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The mind s ascent to God by
a ladder of created things

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THE MIND'S ASCENT TO GOD

BY A LADDER OF CREATED THINGS

BY

BLESSED ROBERT BELLARMIN

Cardinal

Done into English from the Latin by Monialis

WITH A PREFACE BY

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Of the Society of St. John the Evangelist, Cowley

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PREFACE

THE devout reader may feel some surprise at receiving from the hand of a Religious of the English Church, a book written by the most famous of Papal controversialists. Let it be said at once that the *De Ascensione mentis in Deum* is the fruit of one of the great man's annual retreats, and shows us something of the inner life of a public character, and of his mind when liberated in solitude and prayer.

We have five such works of the Cardinal : *De Ascensione*, 1615 ; *De aeterna felicitate Sanctorum* (Of the eternal happiness of the Saints), 1616 ; *De gemitu columbae* (The Mourning Dove), 1617 ; *De septem verbis Christi* (The Seven Words), 1618 ; *De arte bene moriendi* (Holy Dying), dated 1620, the year before his own holy death.

These five books stand in a class by themselves among the works of a vigorous controversialist, and may be used with great profit by people who are repelled by Bellarmin's controversial pleas or, at the best, indifferent to the mingled theology and politics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Robert Francis Romulus Cardinal Bellarmino was indeed, for Englishmen, the typical Jesuit upholder of the claims of the Bishop of Rome. He was, sometimes, too little papalist for some Popes, but we knew him as the opponent of our learned King James in the matter of the Oath of Allegiance, as the protagonist, with Baronius, against Venice and Paolo Sarpi, a public man accepted, by our robust nationalism, as the champion of a Catholic community ' rightly struggling to be free.' A caricature of the Cardinal decorates the old ' Grey-beard ' jugs still found when we disturb the pavements of London.[1]

He was, indeed, no less than the Professor of Controversies in the Roman College; he was involved in the awkward affair of Pope Sixtus the Fifth's Vulgate and its correction; he spent

[1] Several turned up, together with some fragments of the Confessor's shrine (now restored to their place), when we were digging the foundations of St. Edward's House in Westminster.

all his immensely laborious and devoted life—with a short interval in the See of Capua—at the very heart of theological politics and theological administration. He is, in fact, a great figure, the great figure of the counter-Reformation, in so far as that movement is a work, not of devotion, but of argument and of political or social action.

There is another aspect of counter-Reformation effort, or perhaps it should be called more simply another movement. It was a movement comprising the reform of the Spanish Carmelites, and the introduction by de Berulle of the reformed Carmelites into France, the work of Philip Neri, and of the Borromeos, of all those energies of the great bishops, of the Oratory, of the Lazarists and St. Sulpice, which have still their vivid results in the clear-eyed and serious piety of France. It is a movement not yet exhausted but everywhere made evident in the Christian dignity and spiritual vitality of the parochial clergy and its parishioners, too long obscured by the eminence of the Religious Orders and by the all-but-contented worldliness of many seculars.

A greater movement still, the recovery of large elements of the Gospel by such as St. Teresa, the reassertion of the Divine Discipline of the Word, long ago trusted by St. Clement of Alexandria, cannot be spoken of here. It is comparable not to the stirrings of learned Kings and Princes of the Church, nor even to the enlarged pastorates of St. Philip, St. Charles, de Condren, St. Vincent, but to that re-presentation of the spirit and manner of Christ which makes the Little Poor Man of Assisi an alighting point in the mind's effort to pass from the present back to the first days of the Son of Man.

From all these revivals, the lower and the higher alike, how remote—says our critic—is the memory of this stalwart of controversy, this champion of a peculiar, and already past, conception of the Apostolic See ?

These and such things easily occur to any one with a little knowledge of Reformation controversy. They must not forbid us to profit by the spiritual experience and the spiritual teaching of learned divines on either side. All harsher elements must be set down, as was said of the Cardinal by a Pope—and Papal persons were not always satisfied with Bellarmin—to the troubles of the time and not to the character of the debater.

Hesitation of a more important kind may be felt by privileged souls who recoil from our author's word : 'We mortal men, as it seemeth, can find no other ladder whereby to ascend unto God, than the works of God.'

There are who find, 'as it seemeth to them,' that they ascend to God, not by attention to the visible, but by detachment from it. They would say, 'There is a light that shines through creatures, but another light that shines upon them, or rather the same Light in another mode. There is a long and difficult lesson pieced out from the spectacle before us : but this lesson is not really followed with success, unless we receive at least a glimpse of the answer in another way, by a more direct path of communication. God speaks to us in manifold ways by His creation, and He speaks by His prophets. But He has besides a direct light for the soul; and by the help of this light, we partly understand both history and prophets. Indeed it is because he is taught in this more direct way that the prophet speaks and interprets the manifold and often contradictory aspects of the world.' Good. That is true enough. But note, the devout writer chooses his words very exactly. He does not say there is no other *way* to ascend to God, but there is no other *ladder*. Those who need no steps are not concerned with his saying. And every one that needs the steps must look above them before he begins to climb by the successive treads. He must look at once to what the steps lead to, and see them, as Jacob saw the ladder of his vision, coming down from heaven to earth, leading up from stony solitude to God.

To deny, or at all to despair of finding significance in the works, is to run clean away from the lesson of the Incarnation, and to be weak, so far, in the Spirit of Christ.

It is well if those who have found something of the immediate gift are zealous in detachment from lower satisfactions, as they are cautious already in accepting the lower guidance; well, if those who welcome the steps are determined not to rest in them, but to climb them, and to find in every occasion of life an opportunity for the grateful love, itself God's gift, that prepares the soul for a higher rest, and lifts it as on wings to the unchanging sky. At the very lowest, the creatures and the wonderful inspired Scriptures that speak of them to us, are pointers showing the soul how it also may enter into the Heavenly Wisdom.

Certainly those who follow for a few days the instructions of Bellarmin will find that he does not give them crutches they might dispense with, but a secret of escape from all worldliness and all despondency. He does not naturalize our prayer. He spiritualizes our daily walk.

The translation has been most carefully and ably done; and I trust that the work, affectionately and devoutly bestowed upon it, may, by the Divine mercy, find a harvest in the refreshment of souls already intent on prayer, in the invigoration of faith, and the breaking up of the ground of many hearts so that the springs of Divine love may flow, and in the liberation of seekers after God so that, according to His holy Will, they may find Him with the greatest possible directness and simplicity.

P. N. W

LIFE OF BLESSED ROBERT BELLARMIN

ON October the fourth in the year of our Lord, 1542, at Montepulciano in Tuscany a son was born to Vincent Bellarmin and his wife Cynthia, sister of Pope Marcellus II. This child was later to become known to fame as Cardinal Bellarmin, a scholar and controversialist of great ability. He was named Robert after Cardinal Robert Pucci, and his pious father and mother began early to train their child in the practices of piety and devotion. Like many a boy to whom vocation to the priesthood has been given, he used, when quite young, to set up little altars and preach to such an audience as would gather round him in his own home.

While still a lad he wrote a hymn on Saint Mary Magdalene which was preferred before others for insertion in the breviary published in 1568.

In early youth Robert Bellarmin felt drawn to dedicate his life entirely to the service of God, but at first he was uncertain whether the vocation was to the Religious life or to Holy Orders. Needing counsel, he turned for advice to a father of the Society of Jesus, and it was not long before he saw clearly that he must seek admission to that Society.

At the same time his cousin Richard Bellarmin was feeling the call to Religion, and the two youths were eager to make their response forthwith, but they yielded to the pleadings of their respective fathers who urged a year's delay; this interval was so faithfully spent that the Society allowed it to be counted as the first of the five years' novitiate. The year of probation and waiting was spent by the cousins at a house in the

country, where they gave themselves up to study and devotion and to teaching the children of the neighbourhood.

At the end of the year they went to Rome, Robert stopping on the way to visit his father at Montepulciano. By this time the father had realized the truth of his son's vocation and now he was ready to bless him, though in tears he said, 'Go where God calls you, my son: in your person I sacrifice all the hopes of my family.'

So in September, 1560, the two cousins entered the novitiate of the Society of Jesus, and joy was in their hearts. Robert at first was employed in the kitchen, where he was as happy as when at his quiet studies, for his only desire was to do the will of God, and to follow the self-abasement of our Lord, and he rejoiced when difficult and distasteful tasks were committed to him.

Presently came a change of work and he was sent to college to pursue his studies in science and natural philosophy. His health now began to fail, and physicians foretold either an early death or a life of weakness and ill health; but infirmities only served to increase Bellarmin's courage and he continued his life of prayer and mortification with great profit.

After a while he was given a lectureship in Florence, and when he entered on his task he must have appeared more fit for the infirmary than for the lecture room, but his trust in prayer was great, and strength to fulfil his vocation and to complete his work was granted him and his health was soon seen to improve.

His duties next took him to Flanders, and he is said to have preached at Louvain with such great fervour and power, that though not yet in sacred orders he influenced many of his hearers.

The Flemish fathers of the Society desired his ordination, and for this permission was obtained from

Rome and he was ordained priest by Bishop Cornelius Jansen at Liège at Easter, 1570.

For seven years Bellarmin remained in Flanders, preaching and winning in a wonderful way numbers of persons who had hitherto been opposed to the Faith. Then he received the summons of Pope Gregory XIII to lecture in the Jesuit College in Rome, and there he lived a life of untiring labour and of great devotion till he was sent to France to assist Cardinal Cajetan in the political affairs in which he was deeply engaged. On the death of Gregory XIII Cajetan returned to Rome, taking Bellarmin with him.

Not long after he was placed as Superior in the Jesuit house in Rome, and after three years there he became provincial Superior at Naples.

In 1597 he was back in Rome, appointed Penitentiary by Clement VIII, but he obtained leave to abide in the house of the Jesuits which was near the Vatican. In March, 1599, Robert Bellarmin was nominated one of three new cardinals; he begged that he might be passed over, but his petition was not granted, and he humbly accepted the honour bestowed upon him.

In 1602 he was made Bishop of Capua and at once went to live in his diocese, and gave himself to the special work of a bishop of his flock; but when the Pope (then Paul V) required his presence in Rome he felt it necessary to resign his see; and he then, living in Rome, gave himself up to prayer and study, and to the writing of theological books.

His writings show a remarkable spirituality, notably the five short treatises, of which *De Ascensione Mentis in Deum* is one. This he called his 'Benjamin,' for it was written when he had reached the age of seventy-two, and in the prefatory dedication to Cardinal Aldobrandini he says that to this little book he often turned to find consolation and help.

Bellarmin foretold his own death some while before-

hand. On the death of Paul V, when the cardinals gathered together to choose his successor, Bellarmin said to Cardinal Montalte, ' We are now about to elect a pope in the depth of winter: the next pope will be elected in the height of summer, but neither you nor I will assist at his election '—and the forecast was fulfilled.

As time went on the Cardinal's infirmities increased, particularly his deafness, and feeling he could no longer fulfil his duties he begged to be relieved of them, and leave was given for his retirement to a house of his own Society. He chose the Novitiate of Saint Andrew, and there took up his abode in August, 1621. His last illness soon came upon him, and during it he showed his usual patience and gracious manner towards those who waited upon him, and all were edified by his devotion. When death approached he asked for the last Sacraments, and received them with great humility and fervour, and on September 27th, while uttering the adorable and sweet Name of Jesus, he expired, thus ending a long pilgrimage of near eighty years.

Robert, Cardinal Bellarmin was beatified by Pope Pius XI in May, 1923.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

CARDINAL Bellarmin's treatise, *De Ascensione Mentis*, written in 1615, was a favourite book of devout persons of the day in France, in Flanders, in Spain, and in Germany, as well as in Italy.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries translations into English were made and valued, but these appear now to be little known. A French translation by Père Herman, S.J., has been published recently.

The spiritual teaching of this short mystical treatise is so solid, robust, and alluring, that it will be good if it finds readers at the present time.

The versions by Hall (1705) and by Dalton (1841), as well as a Douay version by J. B. (1616), have been of assistance in the preparation of this fresh translation into English.

The outline of Bellarmin's life which is prefixed has been gleaned partly from a French biography written by Père Frizon, S.J., and published at Nancy in 1708; partly from the Cardinal's autobiography published in 1753.

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DEDICATION

To the most illustrious Cardinal Peter Aldobrandini
Robert, Cardinal Bellarmin sends greeting.

LAST September I wrote, by the help of God, a little book about the ascent of the mind to God by a ladder of created things. With permission of our holy father I kept that month for a retreat, setting aside all other business, in order to have leisure for the things of God. Though the little book was written during the retreat for my own private use, friends have urged me to publish it, and my desire is that it should bear your name on its title-page.

If my labour prove to be of any value, it will be of use particularly to those who are occupied in public affairs, such as are the rulers of the Church.

Now among the princes of the Church, burdened with a heavy weight of business, you yourself must be reckoned one of the chief: since you are cardinal, archbishop, chamberlain of the Holy Roman Church, a member of the Inquisition, and patron of many important works.

Another reason leads me to dedicate this work to you, namely my desire of handing down to posterity some record of the many kindnesses I have received at your hands and of my grateful appreciation thereof.

The offering that I make, though it be very small, will, I trust, be none the less pleasing to you: we value a book not so much for its size as for the usefulness of its contents. I do not know what will be the criticism of readers of this little book: as for myself I have found it more useful than other little works of mine. I do

not read my other books unless necessity forces me to do so; this one I have read three or four times, and I am sure that I shall turn to it again. It is possible that I value the book not for its own merit, but because it is, as it were, my Benjamin, for I wrote it in my old age.

Accept then, my dear Cardinal, this little gift from me, not only as a mark of my regard, but also as possibly fulfilling the office of counsellor. If at times you feel yourself overwhelmed with a pressure of business which threatens to hinder you from your accustomed study, and to snatch away the hour of prayer, let this little book gently remind you to withdraw your mind for a few moments from the crowd of cares, and turn it to the joys of the interior life. In meditation and in reading you will have leisure to see that the Lord he is God and that he is the only true, highest, and everlasting good, and that to possess him brings joy, to lose him, only misery.

THE MIND'S ASCENT TO GOD

INTRODUCTION

Of the necessity of seeking God by a ladder of things created. The inscription of this book.

HOLY Scripture doth often admonish us to seek God diligently,[1] for although God is not far from any one of us, since, as the Apostle says, 'In him we live and move and have our being';[2] yet we are far from God, so that unless we daily dispose our hearts to ascend, and make for ourselves a ladder into heaven and seek God very earnestly, we shall, like the prodigal son, come to feed swine in a land far off from our Father and our home.[3] And to explain shortly how these states can exist together, to wit, that God is not far from us, because he always seeth us and before his eyes all things are present: he always thinketh of us, because he careth for us:[4] he always toucheth us because he beareth along all things by the Word of his power:[5] but we are far from God, because we do not see him and have no power to see him, for he dwelleth 'in the light which no man can approach unto,'[6] and we are 'not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves';[7] much less are we able to touch him and cleave to him with pious affection

[1] e.g. Deut. iv. 29; 1 Chron. xvi. 11; Pss. lxix. 33, cv. 4; Isa. lv. 6.
[2] Acts xvii. 28. [3] St. Luke xv. 11. [4] 1 St. Pet. v. 7.
[5] Heb. i. 3. [6] 1 Tim. vi. 16. [7] 2 Cor. iii. 5.

unless his right hand receive us and draw us unto himself. And therefore when David said, 'My soul hangeth upon thee,' he added immediately, 'Thy right hand hath upholden me.'[1] And we are far from God, not only because we cannot see him, but also because being busied about temporal goods with which we are encompassed and overwhelmed, we very easily forget God and with a cold heart we scarce even with our lips pronounce his Name in psalms and sacred prayers. And so this is the cause why the Holy Ghost in the Holy Scriptures, as we were saying even now, doth so often admonish us to seek God.

'Seek ye after God and your soul shall live';[2] and 'Seek his face evermore';[3] and 'The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him';[4] and 'Seek ye the Lord while he may be found';[5] and 'In simplicity of heart seek him';[6] and 'If thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart.'[7]

But although this diligence in seeking God should be the duty of all the faithful, yet it most properly appertains to the prelates of the Church, as Saint Augustine, Saint Gregory, Saint Bernard, and other holy fathers witness. For they plainly write that a bishop cannot profit himself or others unless he diligently apply himself to meditation on divine things and the renewing of his own mind. Saint Augustine in his book *The City of God* saith: 'The love of truth requireth a holy retiredness, and the necessity of charity a just employment, which if it be not imposed upon us we ought not to seek it, but betake ourselves wholly to the holy inquest of truth: but if we be called forth into a place the law and need of charity bindeth us to undertake it. Yet may we not for all this give over our first resolutions, lest we lose the sweetness of

[1] Ps. lxiii. 9. [2] Ps. lxix. 33. [3] Ps. cv. 4. [4] Lam. iii. 25.
[5] Isa. lv. 6. [6] Wisd. i. 1. [7] Deut. iv. 29.

that, and be surcharged with the weight of the other.'[1] And the same Saint Augustine, speaking in his *Confessions* of himself and of his frequent meditation on God by the consideration of creatures, saith: 'I often do this; it delights me, and when I can be spared from my necessary business I have recourse unto this pleasure.'[2] Saint Gregory in his book on the pastoral charge saith: 'Let a prelate be equal unto any in compassion and before all in contemplation, that through the tenderness of piety he may take over the infirmities of others unto himself and by the height of contemplation in seeking after things invisible he may overpass himself';[3] and Saint Gregory in the same connection brings forward the examples of Moses and of Christ. For Moses often went into the tabernacle and again came out. He went in, that he might contemplate the hidden things of God; he came out, that he might bear the infirmities of his neighbours. And Christ himself in the daytime by preaching and working miracles sought the salvation of those around him, but the nights he passed without sleep in prayer and contemplation. 'He continued all night in prayer to God,' writes Saint Luke.[4] Many things also like unto these may be read in the last chapter of the same book. Moreover, Saint Bernard, in order to admonish Pope Eugenius, formerly his pupil, not to give himself wholly to action, but sometime every day to recollect himself and to enjoy holy rest and heavenly food, wrote five books *Of Considerations* in which he not only exhorts him unto the daily meditation on divine things, but also plainly teaches him the manner and method of meditation and how by meditation to ascend, and by ascension to unite himself to God in understanding and affection. Neither does he admit that excuse which he might have put forward and which many do nowa-

[1] *De Civit.* xix. 19, Englished by J. Healy. [2] *Conf.* x. 40.
[3] *De Cura Pastor.* II. 5. [4] St. Luke vi. 12.

days offer: to wit, that the over many businesses wherewith the office of a bishop is accompanied would not afford him leisure enough to apply himself unto meditation on divine things. For none truly ought to give himself so wholly to outward businesses, but that he may take some time to strengthen his body with meat and drink and sleep. And if the body without doubt require refection and rest, with how much more reason doth the soul require her meat and sleep, and it is not possible for her amidst the encumbrances of so many important affairs, without this provision, to fulfil her office rightly. But the meat of the soul is prayer, and her sleep is contemplation, by the which ladders are framed in the heart, that the God of gods may be seen in Sion.[1]

But we mortal men, as it seemeth, can find no other ladder whereby to ascend unto God, than the works of God: for those who by the singular gift of God have by another way become admitted into Paradise to hear God's secrets which it is not lawful for man to utter, are not said to have ascended, but to have been rapt; and this Saint Paul plainly confesses of himself, when he says, 'I was caught up into Paradise and heard many unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.'[2] And that a man may by the works of God, that is by creatures, ascend unto the knowledge and love of the Creator, the book of Wisdom doth teach[3] and the Apostle to the Romans:[4] and reason itself doth sufficiently confirm it, since the efficient cause may be known by the effects, and the pattern by the image: and there can be no doubt that all creatures are the works of God and that man and the angels are not only his works, but also his images, as the Scriptures teach us.

I therefore, moved by these reasons, and having some small degree of leisure from public affairs and

[1] Ps. lxxxiv. 7. [2] 2 Cor. xii. 4. [3] Wisd. xiii. [4] Rom. i. 19.

admonished by the example of Saint Bonaventura, who in a like time of leisure wrote a book entitled *The Pilgrimage of the Mind to God*, have essayed from the contemplation of creatures to make a ladder, by which we may in some sort ascend to God. And I have divided it into fifteen steps after the pattern of the fifteen steps of ascent unto the temple of Solomon, and of the fifteen psalms which are called Gradual, or Songs of Degrees.

FIRST STEP

CONSIDERATION OF MAN

Chapter I

General reasons for this Consideration.

IF any one sincerely desires to raise a ladder by which he may reach to God, let him begin by considering himself. For each one of us is both the creature and the image of God, and nothing is nearer to us than ourselves. With good reason therefore does Moses say ' Give heed to thyself.' On these words Basil the Great wrote a remarkable sermon. For if a man will look around him and consider what lies hidden within him, he will find the whole world, as it were in miniature, and thence he may easily rise up to the Creator of all things.

But I have determined to examine, at the present time, only four general causes : viz. Who is my Maker ; The substance of which he made me ; The form he bestowed upon me; and The end for which he made me.

Now, if I ask about my Maker, I find him to be God alone ; if I seek to know the substance of which he formed me, I find what is altogether nothing ; whence I infer that all that is in me was made by God and that the whole of my being is of God. If I desire to know my form, I shall find that I am the image of God ; if I seek to know my end, I shall find the same God is himself to be my supreme and only good. And so I come to understand that my union with God and my need of him is great, that none but he is my

Creator, the Author of my being, that he is my Father, my pattern, my bliss, and all things. And if I come to understand this, is it possible that I shall fail to seek him with the greatest eagerness, to think of him, yearn after him, desire to see him and embrace him, or that I shall not shudder at the thick darkness of my heart which for so long a time has not thought on, or desired, or sought after God, who alone is all things to me ?

Chapter 2

God our Maker.

But let us consider each point carefully. I ask thee, my soul, who gave thee thy being : when a short time since thou wast nothing ? Certainly thy natural parents did not form thee, for ' that which is born of the flesh is flesh,' and thou art spirit : not heaven or earth, nor the sun nor the stars produced thee, for they are bodies and thou art incorporeal : nor could angels or archangels or other creatures be the authors of thy being, for thou art not sprung from anything material, but thou wast created purely out of nothing. Therefore God alone without a co-worker, without assistant, with his own hands which are his understanding and will, gave thee being when he willed so to do. But perchance thou mayst say, it was not God himself but some created thing that produced my body, so that while the soul owes its being to God, the body ought to acknowledge its parents as its creators. Not so, but God, though making use of parents for the production of the fleshly nature, as the meanest servants are employed for the building of a house, is himself the builder, himself the creator, himself the true father, not only of the soul, but also of the body, and he wills to be so called.

And if the parents of thy fleshly nature were the

real authors of thy being, and, as it were, the builders of thy body, they would doubtless know the number of muscles in the human body, how many are the veins and nerves, how many larger bones, how many smaller, how much moisture and many other things of that kind, of which they are altogether ignorant, unless perchance they have learnt them by studying anatomy. Besides, when the body is sick, when limbs wither or are broken, if the parents were the real creators, they would certainly know how to restore by their own skill that which they, in the first instance, made: just as watch-makers know how to regulate watches, and builders know how to repair houses: but parents possess neither knowledge nor ability to do this, nor anything of the kind.

Add to this, that the union of the soul with the body, which is a particular part of the active human nature, could be accomplished by none but an artificer of infinite power: for by what skill save divine could spirit be joined with flesh in a bond so close as to become one substance? For the body hath no proportion to or likeness with the spirit. Therefore we know that he 'who only doeth great wonders' accomplished it. Truly doth the Spirit of the Lord speak by Moses in the book Deuteronomy, 'Is he not thy father that hath bought thee, hath he not made thee and established thee?' and by holy Job, 'Thou hast clothed me with skin and with flesh,' and by the royal prophet, 'Thy hands have made me and fashioned me,' and again, 'Thou hast fashioned me and laid thine hand upon me,' and by that very wise woman, mother of the Maccabees, 'I neither gave you breath nor life, neither was it I that formed the members of every one of you; but doubtless the Creator of the world, who formed the generation of man, and found out the beginning of all things.'[1]

[1] 2 Macc. vii. 22.

The Wisdom of God, Christ our Lord, said, 'Call no man your father upon earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.'[1] And thus Saint Augustine addressed himself to God concerning his son Adeodatus: 'Excellently hadst thou made him. I had no part in that boy but the sin.'[2] Well then, my soul, if God is the author of thy body and of thy soul, if he is thy father, thy sustainer, thy nourisher, then, if thou art anything, thou art his; if thou hast anything it is from him thou hast it; whatever thou hopest, from him thou hopest. Why dost thou not glory in such a Father? Why dost thou not love him with all thine heart? Why dost thou not for his sake despise all earthly things? Why dost thou suffer thyself to be ruled by vain desires? Lift thine eyes to him; fear not what thine enemy upon earth can do unto thee, when thou hast an Almighty Father in heaven! With what great trust and affection, thinkest thou, did David say, 'I am thine, O save me.'[3] O soul, if thou wouldst consider this, that the Almighty and everlasting God, who stands in no need of thy goods, and who, if thou perishest, loseth nothing, yet turneth not away his eyes from thee, and so loveth, protecteth, guideth, cherisheth thee as if thou wert his greatest treasure, indeed thou wouldst place thy whole trust in him, thou wouldst fear him as thy Lord, love him as thy Father, and there would be no temporal good or evil, however great, able to separate thee from his love.

CHAPTER 3

God created man out of nothing.

LET us come to the substance out of which man was formed.

It is indeed very mean, but the meaner it is, so

[1] St. Matt. xxiii. 9. [2] St. Aug. *Conf.* ix. 6. [3] Ps. cxix. 94.

much the more doth it furnish a fitting ground for forming in us the virtue of humility : and there is nothing more profitable and more rare in this life than this virtue, and for that very reason there is nothing more precious or desirable. And indeed there is no doubt that the substance of the soul is itself nothing, and that nothing meaner or more worthless could be either formed or imagined. The substance out of which the first man was made, what was it but red and barren earth, or dust and clay ? Scripture saith, 'God formed man from dust of the ground';[1] and again, God saith to man, 'Dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return.'[2] Wherefore the patriarch Abraham, remembering his baseness, said unto God, 'Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes.'[3] But even this is not the full extent of the baseness of the human substance, for clay and dust is not formed from another substance, but out of nothing. For 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,' and indeed not out of another heaven and earth, but out of nothing did he make them, and so that from whence this proud animal called man was produced, comes to nothingness, whether you consider the soul or the body. Therefore there is nothing in man of which he can boast, as if he had not received it from God. Indeed the works of men, whatever they may be, whether produced by skill or labour, always possess something of themselves, concerning which, if they had sense, they might boast against their Maker. Thus a vessel of gold, a wooden chest, an ivory or marble house, could it speak, might say to the fashioner, 'To thee I owe my form, but not my substance, and that which I possess of myself is more precious than that which I have received from thee.' But man, who has nothing from himself, or of himself, and is altogether nothing,

[1] Gen. ii. 7. [2] ibid., iii. 19. [3] ibid., xviii. 27.

can boast in nothing. And very truly doth the Apostle say, 'For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself';[1] and, 'What hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?'[2] And Saint Cyprian agrees with him when he says, 'We have nothing to boast of, since we possess nothing.'[3] But thou sayest that men do many famous works and are deservedly praised on that account, in order that virtue, being praised, may increase. It is so, that men do many wonderful works, on account of which they may be praised and esteemed, but in the Lord, not in themselves, as it is written, 'He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord';[4] and, 'My soul shall make her boast in the Lord.'[5] And when a man accomplishes a remarkable work, I inquire of what substance, with what power, by whose direction and assistance does he make it. Certainly he makes it out of a substance, and this substance God provided, and he did not produce it himself: he did the work by the direction and help of God, without whose direction and help man can do nothing good, because God worketh not as man worketh, as the second Council of Orange (A.D. 529) explains. And so it is fitting that God should employ the service of men for performing good deeds which he is able to do himself, so that man may confess himself on this account to be so much the more a debtor to God, and not in order that he may boast in himself, but that he may glory in the Lord.

Therefore, my soul, if thou wilt be wise, lie down always in the lowest place, rob not God of his glory, whether in the smallest or the greatest matter, sink down into thine own nothingness, because that alone belongeth unto thee, and then the whole world will be powerless to lift thee up into pride.

[1] Gal. vi. 3. [2] 1 Cor. iv. 7. [3] St. Cyprian, *Testim.* iii. 4.
[4] 2 Cor. x. 17. [5] Ps. xxxiv. 2.

But because this precious virtue of true humility had almost departed from the earth, and had no place in the books of the philosophers, nor in the customs of nations, the Teacher of humility came himself from heaven, and though being in the form of God and equal to the Father, 'He emptied himself and took upon him the form of a servant, and humbled himself and became obedient even unto death,'[1] and said unto the human race, 'Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.'[2] Wherefore, my soul, if perchance thou art ashamed to imitate the humility of men, be not ashamed to imitate the humility of God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived, and who 'resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.'[3]

CHAPTER 4

Man was made in the image of God.

WE are next to consider form, which is the third cause. And indeed the more unworthy the substance out of which man was made, so much the more precious and excellent do we find the form which was bestowed upon him. I pass by the exterior form, that is the shape of the human body which possesses a distinction of its own, superior to the forms of all creatures ; for this form is not a substantial but an accidental form. The substantial form of man which constitutes him a man, and which distinguishes him from the rest of animals, is the immortal soul, endowed with reason and free will, the image of God, modelled after the pattern of the highest Divinity. For thus we read that when God was pleased to make man, he spake thus, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness : and let them have dominion over the fish of the

[1] Phil. ii. 6. [2] St. Matt. xi. 29. [3] St. Jas. iv. 6.

sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.'[1] Man is then the image of God, not in respect of his body, but of his spirit ; for God is spirit, not a body ; and the image of God, says Saint Basil, is in the part which controls other living creatures.[2]

Now man controls beasts, not by the bodily limbs which in many of the beasts are stronger than in man, but he controls them by the mind, which is endowed with reason and free will. For man surpasses all living creatures, not by that which he possesses in common with them, but by that which distinguishes him from them, and in which he was made like unto God. My soul, lift up then thy mind to thy pattern, and consider any image, how all its goodness consists in its likeness to the original. For if perchance the pattern be misshapen, such as is the usual representation of the devil, then the value of the image is that it represents accurately the deformed pattern ; and so deformity in the pattern will continue to be deformity, and deformity in the image will be its beauty. If the original be beautiful, the image will be very precious, that is to say, if it come up to the beauty of the original pattern as fully as possible ; and if the image possessed perception it would wish for nothing better than to be always attentive to its original, to imitate it, and to become as like it as possible.

O soul, thy pattern is God, the infinite beauty, light in whom is no darkness at all,[3] at whose beauty both sun and moon are amazed. And in order that thou mayst more easily imitate the beauty of so great an original, and desire to copy it, thou wilt do well to seek in every way that in which thy whole perfection, all thy profit, all thine honour, joy, and rest, consist, and in short, that in which thy whole good stands, and

[1] Gen. i. 26. [2] St. Basil, in *Hexaem. hom.* 10. [3] St. John. i. 5.

consider that the beauty of God, who is thine example, doth consist in wisdom and holiness. For just as the beauty of the body is derived from the right proportion of the limbs and pleasing colouring, so in a spiritual being, for pleasing colouring there is the light of wisdom ; proportion of the limbs is righteousness ; and by righteousness is to be understood, not any particular virtue, but that general quality which comprises all virtues. That spirit is therefore the most beautiful whose mind shines with the light of wisdom, and whose will is strong in the fullness of perfect righteousness. But, I say, God is thy pattern, O soul, wisdom itself, righteousness itself, and on this account he is beauty itself. And since both these good qualities are described in the Scriptures by the name of sanctity, in Isaiah the angels are said to cry, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God of hosts'; [1] and to those made in his own image God proclaims, 'Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God am holy'; [2] and our Lord in the Gospel says, 'Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.' [3]

Therefore, O my soul, if thou dost desire to become the true image of God, and to be as like as possible to thy pattern, it behoves thee to love wisdom and righteousness above all other things. True wisdom is to judge of all things according to their highest cause ; the highest cause is the divine will or law which manifests to men the will of God. If therefore thou lovest wisdom, it behoveth thee in all circumstances not to listen to what the law of flesh may prescribe, that which the senses judge to be good, that which the world approves, that which kinsfolk urge, and still less what flatterers suggest: but thou must be deaf to all these, and attend only to the will of thy Lord God ; and thou shouldst always judge that to be useful, glorious, desirable, in short in every respect good, which is in

[1] Isa. vi. 3. [2] Lev. xi. 44. [3] St. Matt. v. 48.

agreement with the will and law of God. This is the wisdom of the saints, concerning which it is written, 'I loved her above health and beauty, and chose to have her instead of light: for the light that cometh from her never goeth out. All good things together came to me with her.'[1] Furthermore, righteousness, which is the other part of spiritual beauty, comprehends all virtues which adorn and perfect the will, but especially charity, which is the mother and root of all virtues and of which Saint Augustine, in his last book on nature and grace, thus speaks, 'Love begun is righteousness begun, love increased is righteousness increased, perfect love is perfect righteousness';[2] for he 'that loveth hath fulfilled the law,' because 'love worketh no ill,' and therefore 'love is the fulfilling of the law,' as the Apostle hath taught us.[3]

And again, 'Whoso keepeth his word,' that is his commandments, 'in him verily is the love of God perfected,' as saith Saint John.[4] Those therefore who desire to become like unto the divine pattern, ought to obey him who says, 'Be ye imitators of God as dear children, and walk in love;'[5] for the Son is the image of the Father, and the whole good of an image is, as we have said above, to be very like its original. O soul, if thou didst fully understand this, and having become like unto thy pattern in the beauty of true wisdom and real holiness, wert pleasing in the eyes of the most high King, what peace wouldst thou enjoy, with what gladness wouldst thou exult! How easily wouldst thou despise all the delights of the world! And on the contrary, if thou didst consider how extremely displeased God is when he sees his image bereft of the light of wisdom and of the beauty of righteousness, defiled, disfigured, darkened, and man, who was placed in so great honour that he was like

[1] Wisd. vii. 10. [2] *De nat. et grat. c.* 70. [3] Rom. xiii. 8.
[4] 1 St. John ii. 5. [5] Eph. v. 1.

unto God, now 'compared with the beasts that perish and become like unto them'[1] thou wouldst indeed shudder and tremble, and wouldst be unable in any way to rest, until thou hadst washed away all the stains in rivers of tears of bitterest contrition, and hadst recovered thy likeness to thy most beautiful example. But since thou art now a wanderer from the Lord and walkest by faith and not by sight, thou needest the constant help of the Lord himself, both in order that thou mayst retain that likeness which thou hast already acquired, and also that thou mayst become daily more like him, that is, more beautiful and more bright. Mourn then with thy whole heart before God, and say unto him: O holy and most merciful Lord, who wast pleased to make this soul of mine in thine image, perfect, I beseech thee, this little image of thyself, increase in it wisdom and righteousness, hide it in the secret place of thy tabernacle, that it may be defiled neither by the mire of fleshly desire, nor by the smoke of worldly honour, nor by the dust of earthly cogitations.

Thus far concerning form.

CHAPTER 5

The intrinsic end of man is the blessed vision of God.

THERE remains the last, which we term the final cause.

Now the end for which man was created is none other than the very God himself: but since the end is twofold, one within, the other without, we will shortly consider each separately.

The intrinsic end of anything is the most perfect condition to which that thing can attain. Thus the intrinsic end of a palace is the finishing and perfection of the palace: for it is then said to be finished when

[1] Ps. xlix. 12.

there is nothing wanting of those things which the structure of the palace requires. The intrinsic end of a tree is that state of perfection which its nature requires: for the tree may then be said to have attained its end when it spreads its branches and produces leaves and is beautified with flowers, and a little later on, is laden with ripe fruit. And so man, who was created for the very highest end, may be said to have attained his end when his mind shall see God as he is: knowledge of all things will follow this vision, and his will will enjoy that supreme good which he so ardently loved and desired, and the body, endowed with immortality and impassibility, and other glorious gifts, will become possessed of perpetual peace and joy. And since the essence of this final beatitude is the vision of God by which we, the very images of God—we ourselves, I say, shall attain to the perfect state and complete likeness to our divine pattern, blessed John writes thus: 'Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.' [1]

O soul, couldst thou conceive what this is, 'We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is,' how quickly would all the clouds of earthly desire be dispersed. God is supremely happy, and supremely happy because he always beholds himself as he is, and takes delight in himself the very highest good, most clearly seen and most ardently loved unceasingly, from all eternity.

And this inestimable good he hath willed thee to share with the holy angels: for this most sublime and lofty end he created thee. This is the meaning of that word, 'Enter into the joy of thy Lord,' [2] namely, be thou partaker of that joy in which God himself rejoices; and again, 'I appoint unto you a kingdom, as

[1] 1 St. John iii. 2. [2] St. Matt. xxv. 21.

my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom,'[1] that is, I will make you sharers of my kingdom and of my royal table, that ye may enjoy that very honour, power, and pleasure which I enjoy, and which God my Father enjoys. And who can think how great is the honour, how great the power, how great the pleasure, how great the happiness of the King of all kings, and Lord of all lords, our Lord God? Indeed, one who raises up his thoughts and expectations to this great and high end, will be ashamed to strive after possession of the earth, or to be cast down on account of some loss of temporal things, or to rejoice over temporal gains: he will blush, I say, to regard with longing such pleasures as beasts eagerly hunt after, since he has been made a companion of angels, and partaker of the friendship of God, and a sharer in his inestimable benefits: for friends have all things in common.

CHAPTER 6

The extrinsic end of man, the glory of God and his own salvation.

THE exterior end of anything is that one for whose sake the thing was made. The end of a palace is the person who dwells in it, the end of a tree is its owner: the end of a man is only the Lord his God, for God not only made man, but made him for himself; he preserves him, feeds him, gives him his reward. So with good reason does he give a command and say, 'Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God and serve him.'[2] But, my soul, observe carefully, other things which were made for man are useful to man, not to themselves; beasts of burden work for man, not for themselves; fields, vineyards, gardens fill man's stores, barns, purses, not their own; labour and sweat and fatigue

[1] St. Luke xxii. 29. [2] Deut. vi. 13.

are the lot of servants, while to the master belong the gain, ease, and pleasure. But the Lord thy God, who is in need of nothing, doth indeed desire that man should serve him, but he willeth also that the profit and gain and reward of the service should belong to man.

'O Lord, good and gracious and of great mercy,'[1] who, if he once begins to taste the sweetness of thy fatherly control or even a particle of it, will not serve thee with all his heart? What, O Lord, dost thou command to thy servants? 'Take,' thou sayest, 'my yoke upon you.' What kind of yoke? 'My yoke,' thou sayest, 'is sweet and my burden is light.' Who would not willingly bear a yoke which does not press but assists, and a burden which does not weigh down but refreshes? Well indeed therefore dost thou add, 'and ye shall find rest unto your souls.'[2] And what is this yoke of thine, which does not weary but brings rest? Is it not that first and great commandment, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart?'[3] For what task can be easier or sweeter than to love goodness and beauty and love, all which indeed thou art, my Lord God? Rightly did David thy servant judge when he decreed that thy commandments are 'more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold, sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb,' and added, 'and in keeping them there is great reward.'[4] What is this, Lord? Dost thou promise also a reward to those who keep thy commandments which in themselves are far above gold and sweeter than honey-comb? Thus indeed dost thou promise reward and still further reward, as thine Apostle James saith, 'The Lord hath prepared a crown of life for them that love him.'[5] And what is this crown of life? It is something so great that we are not able either to conceive of it or to

[1] Ps. lxxxvi. 5. [2] St. Matt. xi. 29. [3] ibid., xxii. 37.
[4] Ps. xix. 10. [5] St. Jas. i. 12.

imagine it. For thus saith Paul, quoting from Isaiah, 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.'[1] Therefore, truly, in keeping thy commandments there is great reward. And not only is that first and greatest commandment profitable to man who obeys, and not to God who commands; but all the other commandments of God do perfect, adorn, instruct, enlighten the man who obeys, and render him good and happy. Wherefore if thou art wise, understand that thou wert created for the glory of God and for thine own eternal salvation, that this is thine end, this the centre of thy soul, this the treasure of thine heart. If thou attain this end, happy wilt thou be, but wretched if thou fall away from it. And so thou wilt consider that to be really good for thee which helps thee to thine end, and that to be really evil which causes thee to slip away from it. The wise man will not seek after nor flee away from prosperity, wealth, health, honour, adversity, poverty, sickness, and dishonour; but whatever leads on to the glory of God and his own everlasting happiness will be considered good and worth seeking after, while all those things which hinder these ends will be considered evil and such as to be avoided.

[1] 1 Cor. ii. 9; Isa. lxiv. 4.

SECOND STEP

CONSIDERATION OF THE GREATER WORLD

Chapter I

The greatness of the world and the greatness of God.

WE have made the first step in our ladder of ascension to God to consist in the consideration of man, which is called the lesser world: now it is our purpose to raise above it a second step from consideration of that huge mass which we commonly call the greater world. Saint Gregory Nazianzus indeed writes in his second discourse on Easter, that God placed men, as it were, a great world within a less, which is true, if we consider the angels apart from the world; for man, considered as part of the universe, is greater than the whole world of bodies, not in size but in power: but if the angels are included in the world, as here we understand it, then man is a little world placed within a greater world. Now in the great world which comprises the sum total of things, there are many most wonderful qualities, but notably these —greatness, multitude, variety, efficiency, and beauty. If we consider all these matters attentively in the light which God gives us, they will have great power to raise our soul so that we shall, as it were, faint in admiration of them, and then, returning to ourselves, we shall look upon everything outside God as naught, and shall consider it worthless.

The earth certainly is large, very large, as the wise

man says, 'Who can find out the height of heaven, and the breadth of the earth, and the deep?'[1] And its greatness may also be understood from the fact that in so many thousand years that have passed since the beginning of the world, the whole surface of the earth (and this is what the wise man calls the breadth) has not yet become known to us men, even to those who carefully explore it. And if I ask what is the size of the earth compared with the circuit of the highest heaven, astronomers answer, and not inaptly, 'No more than a point.' For we see that the rays of the sun reach out to the stars at the opposite end of the firmament as though no earth existed, though indeed it lies in the midst. And if it be, as is the general opinion of learned men, that every star in the firmament is larger than the whole globe of the earth, and yet these stars appear to be very small indeed on account of the enormous distance, who can conceive the extent of the sky in which so many thousand stars are shining? If then, in regard to the surface and the depth of the earth, the wise man said, 'The breadth of the earth and the depth of the abyss who can measure?' what would he say of the exterior surface of the sky and of the depth of the whole world from the highest part of the heavens to the lowest hell? So very great is the bulk of this corporeal world, that no mind, no thought, can grasp it. Well then, my soul, seeing that the world is so great, how great is he that made it? 'Great is the Lord, and there is no end of his greatness.'[2] Hear Isaiah, 'Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure?'[3] Thus Saint Jerome, following the version of Aquila, says[4] that by the word *pugillum* is to be understood the little

[1] Ecclus. i. 3. [2] Ps. cxlv. 3. [3] Isa. xl. 12.
[4] *Comm. in Isa.* xi.

finger, so that the meaning is: That the mass of the waters which is less than the earth, is measured by one little finger of God, the mass of the earth by three fingers, and the heaven, which is greater than the earth and the waters taken together, is weighed by the palm. And these expressions are indeed used metaphorically, for God is Spirit, and, strictly speaking, hath neither fingers nor palm: but the Scripture by comparisons shows very clearly that God is far greater than his creatures, a fact which Solomon points out when he says, 'Heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee.'[1] And this is plainly true, for if another world were created, God would replenish it also, and if there were many worlds, or even if there were an infinite number of worlds, God would fill them all. And think not, my soul, that thy God doth so fill the world, that part of him is in a certain portion of the world and the whole God is in the whole world. For God is without parts, and is whole in the whole world, and whole in every portion of it, and so he is present everywhere in his omnipotence and wisdom. Therefore if thou wilt be faithful to him, let not thine heart be afraid even though an army be against thee, for why should a man fear who hath with him the Almighty Father, Friend and Spouse, all-seeing and most affectionately loving him? But if by reason of thy sins thou hast become blameworthy, thou hast for thy judge an angry God, an all-powerful enemy, beholding all things, and hating sins with an implacable hatred: then indeed thou dost well to be horribly afraid, and thou oughtest to give rest neither to thine eyes nor to thy feet, until by hearty repentance thou hast appeased thy God, and till thou breathe once more in the light of his compassion.

[1] 2 Chron. vi. 18.

CHAPTER 2

The number of created things and the infinite perfection of the Creator.

Now who shall count the number of things created by one God the Maker of heaven and earth? 'Who can number the sand of the sea and the drops of rain?' saith the wise man.[1]

But setting aside these very small things, how many metals are there, gold and silver, brass and lead, precious stones, gems, and pearls, both in the earth and in the sea? On the earth how many genera, species, and kinds of herbs, fruits, and plants, and how many parts in each? What is the number of genera, species, and kinds of animals, perfect and imperfect, quadrupeds, reptiles, birds: how many genera, species, and kinds of fishes in the sea? Who can count them? What of the races of men, of whom it is written, 'The increase of man is according to thy secret counsel'?[2]

Finally, ask how many stars there are in the sky? Concerning the stars we read in the Scriptures, which we know to be true, 'Tell the stars if thou canst number them.'[3] And elsewhere it compares the number of the stars with the sand of the sea. 'As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured,'[4] which is as much as to say they are countless. And of the angels Daniel writes, 'Thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.'[5] And Saint Thomas, agreeing with Dionysius, affirms that the number of angels is so great that it surpasses the multitude of material things.[6]

Thus the multitude of things which is wellnigh

[1] Ecclus. i. 2. [2] Ps. xi. 8, Vulg. [3] Gen. xv. 5.
[4] Jer. xxxiii. 22. [5] Dan. vii. 10.
[6] *Summa Theol.* I, Q. i, art. 3; Dionys. Areop. *Hier. Caelest. c.* 4.

infinite, created by one omnipotent God, shows that in the Divine Essence itself the perfections are altogether infinite. For God willed that man should in some measure know him through his creatures, and because no single created being could fitly represent the infinite perfection of the Creator, he multiplied creatures, and bestowed on each a certain degree of goodness and perfection, that from these we might form some idea of the goodness and perfection of the Creator, who in one most simple and perfect essence contains infinite perfections, somewhat after the manner in which a gold coin contains the value of many copper coins.

Therefore, my soul, whenever thy sight or thy mind is arrested by anything which seems worthy of admiration, let that thing become a ladder by which thou risest to the knowledge of the perfection of thy Maker, which without doubt is far more great and wonderful. So will it come to pass, that created things, which, as Solomon teaches, are 'a snare to the feet of the unwise,'[1] will not deceive thee, but will instruct thee and will not be the occasion of thy fall, but will form a step towards a better state. And so if thou meet with gold, or silver, or precious stones, say in thine heart: My God is more precious, and he hath promised to give himself to me, if I will despise these things. If kingdoms and earthly governments strike thee with wonder, say in thine heart: How much more splendid is the kingdom of heaven which abideth for ever, and which God, who cannot lie, hath promised to them that love him! If pleasures and delights begin to excite thy senses, say in thine heart: Spiritual delight is far more lovely than carnal delight, and delights of the mind are far more desirable than those of the body, for the latter are offered to us by a mortal creature, the former by the God of all consolation, and he who tasteth these

[1] Wisd. xiv. 11.

can say with the Apostle, 'I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation.'[1] And lastly, if something beautiful, new, unusual, great, or wonderful presents itself to thee in such a way as to withdraw thy heart from the Lord thy God, answer firmly, that though there be good in these things, yet far more and far better are certainly to be found in thy Lord; and it is not for thy profit to change gold for brass, and jewels for glass, great things for small, certainty for doubt, eternal things for temporal.

CHAPTER 3

The variety of created things and God the source of all good.

BUT although the multitude of created things is wonderful, and a proof of the multiform perfection of the one God, still more wonderful is the variety which appears in that multiplication, and it leads us more easily to the knowledge of God; for it is not difficult with one seal to make many impressions exactly alike, or to cast numberless letters in the same mould, but to vary shapes almost infinitely, which is what God has done in creation, this is in truth a divine work and most worthy of admiration. I pass by genera and species, which every one agrees are exceeding various and diverse: in the separate forms of herbs, plants, flowers, and fruits what a great variety there is! Shapes, colours, scent, taste, do not these vary almost infinitely? But what shall I say of mankind; when in a large army, consisting of an immense number of men, scarcely two are found exactly alike? It is the same with the stars and the angels; for 'one star differeth from another star in glory,' as the Apostle testifies,[2] and Saint Thomas affirms that although the

[1] 2 Cor. vii. 4. [2] 1 Cor. xv. 41.

angels are more in number than corporeal beings, yet all are not only separate, but that all differ in their particular form.[1]

Raise now, my soul, the eye of thy mind towards God in whom are the ideas of all things, and from whom, as from an inexhaustible fountain, this wellnigh infinite variety springs: for God could not have impressed those numberless forms on created things unless in a most eminent and exalted mode he had kept their ideas or patterns in the depth of his own Being. Therefore well does the Apostle exclaim, 'O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!'[2] For truly fathomless must be the depth of that well, in which lie hidden the treasures of riches, of wisdom, of knowledge, able to produce such an infinite variety of things.

Well also did Saint Francis, when illuminated by the divine light, say unto the Lord, 'My God and my all,' because the various good things which are rarely found distributed among created things are found in altogether a higher and better way united in one God.

But, my soul, thou mayst say, it may be that what you affirm be true, but the goodness of created things we see with our eyes, touch with our hands, taste with our mouths, we truly possess and enjoy: God we do not see, nor do we touch, nor taste, nor possess, and scarcely by thought can we apprehend him as we apprehend a thing placed at a great distance: and so it is not to be wondered at, if created things affect us more than God affects us. But, my soul, if thy faith is living and alert, thou must allow that after this life, which fleeth as a shadow, provided thou continue in faith and hope and love, thou shalt behold God himself, truly and clearly as he is in himself, and thou shalt possess him, and thou wilt enjoy him far better and more intimately than now thou art enjoying created

[1] *Summa Theol.* I, Q. c, art. 4. [2] Rom. xi. 33.

things. Hear the Lord himself, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.'[1] Listen to the Apostle Paul, 'Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face.'[2] Hear also Saint John, 'We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.'[3]

Next I ask thee, what portion of this world belongs to thee? Certainly not the whole world, nor a half, nor a third, nor a fourth part; but a certain very small portion, in a degree, pertains to thee and that after a short time, whether thou wilt or no, thou wilt be compelled to quit. But thou wilt wholly possess God, in whom are all things, and shalt possess him for ever: for to the saints and blessed ones God will be all in all without end. He will be thy life, thy food, thy raiment, thy home, thine honour, thy riches, thy delight, and thine all. Add to which, this God of thine, tender and gentle, doth not command thee while thou art a pilgrim on this earth to put away from thee altogether all consolation from creatures; rather it was in order that they might be of service to thee, that all things were fashioned. But this he doth command, that thou use them moderately, temperately, and with sobriety, and that thou cheerfully share them with those in need, that the creatures do not rule over thee, but thou over them, and that thou use them in such a manner as to find favour with God.

Consider therefore, earnestly, which is the more profitable: to have in this life such created things as are necessary, and in the next life to enjoy thy Creator himself, in whom, as I have repeatedly said, are all things, and that for ever and ever; or in this life to be eagerly labouring for the possession of temporal things and yet never to be satisfied, and at last to be suddenly bereft of all temporal goods and fall short of attaining to the eternal good things of eternity?

Lastly, add this, that God is not so far away from

[1] St. Matt. v. 8. [2] 1 Cor. xiii. 12. [3] 1 St. John iii. 2.

his beloved ones but he bestows upon them, even in this life, great consolations, greater than the lovers of this world find in things created. Truly is it written, 'I remembered God and rejoiced';[1] and, 'Rejoice the soul of thy servant, for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.'[2] And leaving out other passages, when the Apostle says, 'I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation,'[3] he surely does not mean, that of tribulation is produced consolation, and of sorrow joy, for thorns cannot bring forth grapes, nor can thistles bring forth figs; but he means that God bestows upon his friends such pure and clean solid consolations to soothe their griefs, that temporal joys are in no way to be compared with them. Let this then, O my soul, be thy firm conviction: he who finds God finds all things; he who loses God loses all things.

CHAPTER 4

The power implanted in created things and the Omnipotence of God.

WE go on now to see how, by considering the power which God has bestowed upon created things, we may rise up to understand the infinite power of the Creator. There is nothing which is without a certain marvellous power, or force, or efficacy. If a lump of earth or a stone fall from a height, by the very force of its motion it works destruction, and anything resisting it is broken to pieces. When the Holy Spirit would describe in the Apocalypse the tremendous force with which Babylon the Great, that is the whole company of the wicked, will be cast down into the depth of the abyss in the day of judgement, he tells us, 'And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great mill-stone,

[1] Ps. lxxvi. 3, Vulg. [2] Ps. lxxxvi. 4, A.V. [3] 2 Cor. vii. 4.

and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.' [1]

And water, which is smooth and soft, flows gently over the face of the earth, but when it is raging and foaming in rivers or torrents, it lays low and destroys everything in its path, not only cottages of the peasantry, but even gates, and walls of cities, and marble bridges we have seen demolished by it. The winds, which are sometimes calm, and blow gently, may drive great ships on to rocks and uproot and overturn old oaks. I myself have seen a thing which I should not believe had I not seen it, an immense heap of earth cast up by a very strong wind, and the same heap carried to a certain village so that in the place where the earth had been cast up, there remained only an immense pit, and the whole village on which the earth fell was covered and, as it were, buried.

What shall we say about fire? How swiftly does a small fire become a flame great enough to bring houses and woods in a moment to nothing! 'Behold,' saith Saint James, 'how great a matter [*wood*, margin A.V.] a little fire kindleth.' [2]

How many virtues do herbs contain! In stones, and particularly in the loadstone and in amber, what wonderful powers do we perceive! Then in the animal world, we see some creatures very strong, as the lion, bear, bull, elephant; others very clever, though very small, like the ant, the spider, the bee, the fly. I do not now speak of the power of the angels, the virtue of sun and stars, which are far distant from us, but come to consider the wit of man, by which so many arts have been invented, that we are often in doubt whether nature yields the palm to art, or art to nature.

Now, O soul, lift up the eyes of thy mind to God,

[1] Apoc. xviii. 21. [2] St. Jas. iii. 5.

and think what great power, force, and strength is in the Lord thy God, whom the Scripture most rightly addresses thus: 'Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the mighty ones?'[1] and, 'Who only doeth marvellous things,'[2] and, 'The blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords.'[3] For whatsoever strength created things possess, they derive from God, and they enjoy it as long as God pleases they should have it. For who but God caused that Jonah, shut up in the whale's belly, should have no hurt from the waves of the sea, or the teeth of the whale? Who but God shut the mouths of the hungry lions that they should not touch Daniel? Who but God preserved unhurt the Three Children in the burning furnace? Who said unto the stormy wind and to the raging sea, 'Peace be still,' and immediately there was a great calm, who but Christ, the true God?

Now God derives not his strength and power from another, but his will is his power, and a power which none can withstand. He possesses always infinite power, and in comparison with it, all power of men is not merely small and mean, but it is altogether nothing: for thus saith Isaiah, 'All nations before him are as nothing; and they are accounted unto him less than nothing, and vanity.'[4]

Are they not therefore foolish who fear created things and fear not God Almighty, and who trust in their own power or in that of their friends and not in God Almighty? 'If God be for us, who can be against us?'[5] and if God be against us who shall be for us? Wherefore my soul, if thou be wise, 'Humble thyself under the mighty hand of God.'[6] Cling to him with true devotion and thou shalt not need to fear what man or devil or any creature can do unto thee. But if perchance thou fallest from devotion,

[1] Exod. xv. 11, marg. A.V. [2] Ps. cxxxvi. 4. [3] 1 Tim. vi. 15.
[4] Isa. xl. 17. [5] Rom. viii. 31. [6] 1 St. Pet. v. 6.

and provokest thy God to anger, give thyself no rest until thou be at peace with him, for 'it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.' [1]

CHAPTER 5

The created beauty of things and the uncreated beauty of God.

IT remains for us to consider the beauty of created things, of which the prophet saith, 'For thou, Lord, hast made me glad through thy works'; [2] and indeed as all things that God hath made are good, so also will they be found beautiful, if they be rightly regarded. But leaving other things aside, we will consider those things which the opinion and judgement of all men allow to be beautiful. In truth, great is the beauty of a green field, of a well-kept garden, of a pleasant wood, of a calm sea, of serene air, of springs, of rivers, of cities, of the glittering heavens bedecked with countless stars shining like jewels. Then how delightful the beauty of a tree clothed with flowers, or laden with fruit, the forms of various four-footed creatures, the flight of birds, the play of fishes! What shall I say of the beauty of the stars and of the moon, and still more of that very great and notable splendour of the sun, which at its rising animates the whole earth?

But nothing delights men more than the beauty of their own form, and it is to men that we are particularly speaking. We have often seen and grieved over, intelligent men, enamoured of the beauty of women, and on the other hand, grave and honourable women led to foolishness by reason of the beauty of men, so that they put home, honour, children, and parents, life itself, and I might even say their eternal salvation, second to their love of beauty in men. These are plain

[1] Heb. x. 31. [2] Ps. xcii. 4.

facts read in Holy Scripture in regard to David, Solomon, and Samson, and history is full of like examples.

Now my soul, if such beauty has been bestowed upon creatures by God, their Creator, how great and how marvellous must be the beauty of the Creator himself, the All-beautiful ! For no one can give to another what he does not possess, and if men were so charmed with the form of the sun and stars, that they mistook those luminous bodies for gods, Wisdom saith, 'Let them know how much better the Lord of them is, for the first author of beauty hath created them.' [1] But the greatness of the beauty of God is learnt not only from the fact that the beauty of all creatures is found gathered together in a far higher degree in him, but also from this, that though he is invisible to us and only known by our belief in the Scriptures, and in the mirror of created things, so long as we are wandering apart from him, yet many of the saints have been so ardent in their love of him that some even hid themselves in desert places and gave themselves up to the contemplation of him alone : such were Saint Mary Magdalene, Paul the first hermit, Anthony the Great, and others without number, concerning whom Theodoret's religious history may be consulted ; others, leaving wives and children and whatever possessions they had in the world, chose to live in monasteries, subject to the will of others, that they might enjoy the friendship of God ; others again desired to spend their life freely in sharp pain, that they might be worthy to attain to the vision of his infinite beauty. Hear one of these, the holy martyr Ignatius, in his letter to the Romans: 'Come fire and cross and conflicts with wild beasts, wrenching of bones, mangling of limbs, crushing of the body ; come grievous torments of the devil upon me—only may they aid me in attaining unto Jesus Christ.' [2]

[1] Wisd. xiii. 3. [2] Ignat. *Ep. ad Rom.* 5, trans. J. H. Srawley, D.D.

If then the divine beauty, not yet seen, but only believed and hoped for, stirreth up such a great fire of longing, what will it do when the veil is removed, and it shall be seen as it is in itself? This will happen, that, drinking of his pleasures as out of a river,[1] we shall neither wish to, nor shall we be able to, turn our eyes away from it for one moment. And is it any wonder that to angels and blessed spirits, who always behold the face of the Father who is in heaven, the vision brings neither weariness nor satiety, since God himself, always beholding his own beauty, hath been eternally satisfied with it? And as if into a wine cellar and into a garden of all manner of delights, a man shall enter, and never thence depart, for all eternity.

Seek then this beauty, O my soul, sigh after it day and night: say with the prophet, 'My soul is athirst for God, when shall I come to appear before the living God?'[2] Say with the Apostle, 'We are confident and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.'[3]

And fear not defilement from the fervent love of that beauty; for the love of divine beauty does not enfeeble the heart, but perfects it, sanctifies and does not injure it. The holy virgin and martyr Agnes truly said, 'I love Christ, whose Mother is a virgin, whose Father knew not woman; when I love him I am chaste, when I touch him I am pure, when I receive him I am a virgin.'[4]

But if thou desirest indeed the uncreated beauty of thy Lord, it behoves thee to fulfil what the Apostle subjoins: 'Wherefore,' saith he, 'we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.'[5] If God is pleasing to thee, thou oughtest to be pleasing to God. And indeed in the land of the

[1] Ps. xxxvi. 8. [2] Ps. xlii. 2. [3] 2 Cor. v. 8.
[4] Prudentius. [5] 2 Cor. v. 9.

living, when we shall be in his presence, enlightened with his brightness, without doubt we shall be pleasing to God, as the prophet says, 'I will please God in the land of the living';[1] but in this pilgrimage we so easily become smirched and stained by the mire of sin; as the Apostle James saith, 'In many things we offend all';[2] and the prophet David, to show how few are undefiled in the way, pronounced a beatitude on the attainment of that state, 'Blessed are those that are undefiled in the way.'[3]

Therefore, O soul, if while absent from thy beloved and on thy pilgrimage, thou art desirous of pleasing him, it is not enough to wish to please him, but thou must, as the Apostle says, *strive* to please him, that is, with earnest care labour to avoid stains which are a blemish on the soul, and if any should cling to it, with no less zeal and labour to wipe them away. Do but see the young women who desire to please their husbands, how many hours they spend in arranging their hair, in powdering their faces, and removing every trace of stain from their clothes that they may give pleasure to the eye of a mortal man, who must shortly be turned to dust and ashes. What therefore shouldst thou do to please the eye of thine immortal spouse, who is always beholding thee, and who desires to find thee without spot or wrinkle? Certainly it is necessary for thee to strive with all thy might, 'to walk in holiness and righteousness before him,'[4] and carefully to remove everything which hinders true holiness and righteousness, and cut it off: nor to have regard to flesh and blood, nor to heed the words or judgements of men: for thou canst not at the same time please God and the world: as the Apostle saith, 'If thou wilt please men thou art not the servant of Christ.'[5]

[1] Ps. cxvi. 9, Vulg. [2] St. Jas. iii. 2. [3] Ps. cxix. 1.
[4] St. Luke i. 75. [5] Gal. i. 10.

THIRD STEP

CONSIDERATION OF THE WORLD

Chapter I

That as our body finds its rest in the world, so our mind can rest in God alone.

WE have considered the world as a whole; now let us pass on to its chief divisions, that from these we may raise a ladder such as it is possible to make, which will bring us to the contemplation of its Maker.

The first is earth, which although holding the lowest place and appearing less than the other elements, yet is in reality not inferior to water, and indeed in dignity and value it surpasses all the elements. Hence we read in the holy Scriptures that God made heaven and earth, as if to say they were the chief parts of the world, to which all the rest minister: for he made heaven, as it were, the palace of God and of the angels, and the earth the palace of man. 'The heaven of heavens is the Lord's and the earth hath he given to the children of men,' saith the prophet.[1] And this is the reason why the heaven is full of shining stars and the earth abounds in stores of metals, precious stones, herbs, trees, and many kinds of animals: while the water abounds in fish alone, and the air and fire are elements barren and wellnigh empty. But these facts apart, there are three things in the earth particularly worthy of consideration, and if we approach to consider them

[1] Ps. cxv. 16.

with watchful mind we shall without difficulty be able to rise by means of them, to God.

First, the earth is the very first foundation of the whole world, and if we had not this foundation man could neither walk, nor be at rest, nor work, nor spend his life in any kind of way.

'He hath made the round world so sure,' saith David, 'that it cannot be moved.'[1] 'He laid the foundations of the earth that it never should move.'[2]

Secondly, the earth, as a good nurse to man and living creatures, with great care brings forth herbs, fruits, seeds, berries, and countless other things of the kind. For thus God spake, 'Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed which is upon the face of the earth and every tree in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed, to you it shall be for meat, and to every beast of the earth.'[3]

Thirdly, the earth produces stones and wood for building houses, and metals of brass and iron for various purposes, and gold and silver, of which is coined money, a convenient means for gathering together all that is necessary for the life of man.

And that primary property of earth, namely that it is the place in which our bodies rest, which they cannot do either in water or air or fire, is a symbol of the Creator, in whom alone the human soul can find a place of rest: 'Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord,' says Saint Augustine, 'and our heart is unquiet until it rest in thee.'[4] King Solomon, if any one did, sought rest in his government, in riches, in pleasures: he maintained his extensive kingdom in peace, so that, as Scripture witnesseth, 'Solomon reigned over all the kingdoms from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt: they brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life.'[5] He had

[1] Ps. xciii. 2. [2] Ps. civ. 5. [3] Gen. i. 29, 30.
[4] *Conf.* i. 1. [5] 1 Kings iv. 21.

besides countless riches: forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots and twelve thousand horsemen: and as we read in the same book, the fleet of Solomon brought gold from Ophir and precious gems in such quantities that silver was accounted of no value and was as plentiful in Jerusalem as stones in the streets. The number of pleasures he procured for himself seems incredible; but let us hear him speak himself: 'I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards; I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits: I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees: I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me: I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem; also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour.'[1] These words were written by the man who possessed rest in the highest degree, if rest is to be had in created things. For nothing was wanting to him—kingdom, riches, or pleasures, not even that which is reckoned of the very highest value, namely human wisdom, and there was not even lacking peace and quietness in the possession and retaining such good things for a length of time. Let us then ask whether he found rest in these things and if they were able to satisfy the capacity of his soul: he says, 'Then

[1] Eccles. ii. 4–10.

I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.' [1] And so Solomon found not rest in these great riches, pleasure, wisdom, and honours, nor could he have found it had they been far more in number and much greater, for the human soul is immortal, and these things are mortal, and cannot abide long under the sun: nor indeed could it ever come to pass that the mind of man, capable of infinite good, should be satisfied with finite good things. For just as the human body cannot rest in the air however open, nor in water however deep, because its centre is not air or water but earth: so the human soul cannot rest in aerial dignities, worthless riches, or in watery, that is soft and sordid, pleasures, nor in the false glory of human knowledge; but it can rest in God alone, who is the centre of souls, and the true and only place of their rest.

O how true and how wise was the father of Solomon when he said, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee, and what is there upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee? For thou art the God of my heart and my portion for ever'; [2] as if he would say: I find nothing in heaven, in earth, nor in any created thing, whether under heaven or upon the earth, able to bring me true rest: thou alone art the God of my heart, that is, thou alone art the solid rock for my heart—for the word 'God' in the Hebrew text in this place signifies 'rock'—thou only art the most firm rock for my heart, in thee alone will I rest, thou alone art my portion, mine inheritance, all my good. All other things are nothing, and nothing can fill and satisfy me, and this not for one or two days or a year, but for ever. Thou alone sufficest me for ever, all other things fail to satisfy even for one day.

[1] Eccles. ii. 11. [2] Ps. lxxiii. 25.

Dost thou not learn then, my soul, that God alone is thy rock, in whom thou canst rest, that all other things are vanity and vexation of spirit, which indeed have no existence, but only appear to have, and do not afford solace, but only affliction, since they are gained by labour and with grief held in possession?

Therefore, if thou art wise, despise all things that pass, lest they carry thee away with them: and abide in one alone and cleave in a bond of love, to him who abideth for ever. Lift thine heart to God in heaven, lest it become corrupt upon earth; learn true wisdom from the folly of many, in whose name Wisdom speaketh and saith: 'Therefore have we erred from the way of truth, and the light of righteousness hath not shined unto us, and the sun of righteousness rose not upon us: we have gone through deserts where there lay no way: but as for the way of the Lord, we have not known it: we wearied ourselves in the way of wickedness and destruction. What hath pride profited us, and what good hath riches with our vaunting brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow and we were consumed in our own wickedness.'[1]

CHAPTER 2

We are safely grounded in God.

BUT there is another reason why the firm rock is a symbol of our Lord, which the Wisdom of God explained to us in his Gospel, when he said that a house built upon a sure rock remains immovable, if the rain falls upon it from above and the winds blow upon it from the side and rivers rush upon it from beneath: while a house built upon the sand can stand against none of these things, but at the first onset of rain or wind or flood, it is cast down and the ruin of that house

[1] Wisd. v. 6.

is great.[1] Thine own house, O soul, whose rooms and halls consist of various powers and virtues, will be secure if it be thus founded upon God, that is, if thou believest firmly in God, if thy whole trust is in God, if thou art rooted and grounded in the love of God, so that with the Apostle thou canst say, 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?'; [2] and be assured that neither spiritual wickednesses which are above us, nor fleshly desires which are beneath us, nor the enemies of our household, namely relations and friends, which attack from every side, will ever prevail against thee with their scheming. The strength of spiritual powers is indeed great and their craftiness also, but greater is the power and greater the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, who keeps guard over that house which is builded in God. The flesh fighteth powerfully against the spirit, and fleshly desires continue to attack the strongest; but the love of God easily conquers carnal love and the fear of God easily casts down the fear of the world.

Lastly, a man's foes are they of his own household,[3] and these by their advice draw souls into the company of sinners: but the soul who believes that she hath in the Lord, father, brother, and spouse in heaven, not only easily despises carnal friends and relations, but also knows how to hate them, and can say with the Apostle, 'I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'[4] But the wretched soul whose house is built upon the sand cannot long abide, and in a short time the ruin of that house will be great, since it believes a lie and trusts in a reed for a staff, and its god is either the belly or money, or vapour of honour which all very quickly pass away and perish, and drag to everlasting destruction the soul that clings to them.

[1] St. Matt. vii. 24. [2] Rom. viii. 35. [3] St. Matt. x. 36. [4] Rom. viii. 38.

CHAPTER 3

Earth nourishes the body by the power of God, who alone is the support of the whole man.

Now a second property of earth is this, that, as a good nurse, she produces liberally herbs and fruits to be the food of men and other animals. And this very property leads us to the Founder and the true nourisher: for it is not the earth in itself, but God who produces all good things in the earth. For thus saith the Holy Spirit by the mouth of David, 'These wait all upon thee, that thou mayst give them meat in due season. When thou givest it them they gather it and when thou openest thy hand they are filled with good';[1] and the Lord in the Gospels saith, 'Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them';[2] and the Apostle, 'Nevertheless God left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.'[3] And that is true which is said in the beginning of the book Genesis, 'Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind.'[4] For indeed the earth doth bring forth grass and trees which bear fruit, but by the power bestowed upon it by God, by which very power God himself produces and preserves and gives the increase.

And so when David invites all created things to praise the Creator, he joins to the company 'fruitful trees and all cedars';[5] and the three children with Daniel are exhorted with all the rest of creation, all the things that grow on the earth, to bless the Lord and 'praise him and exalt him above all for ever.'[6]

[1] Ps. civ. 27. [2] St. Matt. vi. 26. [3] Acts xiv. 17.
[4] Gen. i. 11. [5] Ps. cxlviii. 9. [6] Song of the Three Children.

And since all things praise God after this manner, with how great affection oughtest thou, O soul, to bless and praise God for all the benefits which thou enjoyest so freely, beholding in them the hidden hand of God bestowing all things, and the love of thy God not hidden, but plainly to be seen showing itself most pure and paternal, never ceasing to bless thee from heaven and to provide for thee in all things. But this is little in the eye of thy Lord God: for it is he who in thee, as in his own spiritual field, brings forth the most splendid fruit of love. For love is not of the world, but it is of God, as the beloved disciple says in his Epistle.[1] From charity, as from a divine and heavenly tree, are produced the white and sweet-scented flowers of holy thoughts, verdant leaves of words profitable to man's salvation, fruits of good works, by which God is glorified and the neighbour assisted, merits are acquired and preserved unto life eternal.

But woe to those who, after the manner of senseless beasts, desire satisfaction from the fruits of the earth and eagerly collect them and hide them away, thinking not of their Maker nor giving him thanks. The souls of such are like the earth which God cursed and which brought forth thorns and thistles. For when God is not sowing the seed of holy thoughts, what can fill their minds but murders, thefts, treachery, and other things of that kind, and what is their speech but of blasphemy, perjury, cursing, heresies, banquets, contumely, false witnessing, lying, and such things learnt from their father the devil? And what fruit do they at last produce but those poisonous fruits which we have said are eagerly pondered by them and which the Apostle calls 'works of the flesh'?[2] These are indeed thorns which at first pierce the minds of those who produce them, with the sharp pricking of fears and cares, then they pierce the fair repute, the bodies

[1] 1 St. John iv. 7. [2] Gal. v. 19.

and minds of neighbours, making serious and often incurable bruises which afterwards bring grievous harm to others.

But passing by these things, do thou, my soul, if thou art a little garden belonging to the heavenly husbandman, beware lest thorns and briars be found in thee, but with all care cherish the tree of charity, the lily of chastity, the spikenard of humility: beware lest any one persuade thee to think that these heavenly seeds of virtues spring from thyself and not from thy Lord God, who is the Lord of virtues, the inspirer of holy purposes; but see that thou attribute the preservation and increase and perfection of the fruit of good works not to thyself, but to him, and let thy strength be always in him.

CHAPTER 4

The treasures of the earth are as it were a shadow of the eternal good things of God.

THERE remains the last glory of the earth, namely that it contains within itself, gold, silver, and precious stones. But in truth the earth does not produce these precious things by its own power, but he produces them, who speaks by Haggai, 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine.'[1] O thou lover of men, is this not pleasing to thy loving-kindness, that not only were stones, wood, iron, brass, lead, and other kinds of things which are necessary for building houses, ships, and various instruments produced from the earth, but also gold and silver and precious stones for adorning and beautifying them? And if thou bestowest these things on those who wander about the earth and often even upon thine enemies who blaspheme thy Name, what wilt thou give to thy beloved ones, blessing thee and reigning with thee in heaven? Thou wilt give, not

[1] Hag. ii. 9.

a small piece of silver, nor tiny precious stones, but that city of which the Apostle John speaks in the Apocalypse, saying, 'And the building of the wall of it was of jasper, and the city was pure gold, and the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones, and the twelve gates were twelve pearls.' [1]

But we are not to think that the heavenly Jerusalem, the city that is above, is adorned or builded with gold and gems and pearls belonging to this earth: we know that these words are used by the Holy Spirit in speaking to us because we are unable to perceive the better and greater things; but most certainly that land which is the home of the elect of God will be far more beautiful than all the cities of this pilgrimage, just as a city all gold and precious stones surpasses the village of huts of rustics, which are built of mud and straw.

Raise therefore, my soul, the eyes of thy mind to heaven, and think how highly the good things therein should be valued, since the gold, silver, and precious stones which here are so highly regarded, when compared with them, are scarcely worthy of the name of mud or straw. Add to which that the gold, silver, and pearls which we consider so valuable, are perishable, while those which glitter in the heavenly city yonder are incorruptible and everlasting.

But if by the hands of the poor thou wilt lay up in the heavenly city this same corruptible gold and silver, which if thou art wise thou wilt surely do, it will become incorruptible and will remain with thee always. For the Truth, who cannot lie, saith, 'Sell what thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven'; [2] and in another place, 'Sell that ye have and give alms: provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that fadeth not, where no thief approacheth nor moth corrupteth.' [3]

[1] Apoc. xxi. 18. [2] St. Matt. xix. 21. [3] St. Luke xii. 33.

O unbelief of the sons of men ! A liar promises ten for a hundred, and that he will repay to a lender the whole sum of money, and he is believed: God, who cannot lie, promises to him who bestows alms treasure in heaven, and to give even more than a hundredfold, and life eternal : the avaricious man is fearful and cannot be persuaded to believe it, and would rather hide his treasure where rust consumes it and where thieves break in and steal, than lay it up in heaven where neither thief steals nor rust consumes.

But, O unhappy man, even if thieves do not rob, nor moth or rust corrupt, to whom will belong those things which thou hast gathered together with such great labour ? Thine, for certain, they will not be, and yet they might have been thine if thou hadst laid them up in the heavenly treasury by the hands of the poor. For experience shows that the things which avaricious persons collect fall into the hands of spendthrifts who divide, and in a very brief time scatter, what their avaricious parents have gathered together, and meanwhile the sin of avarice remains and will remain for ever and the worm of conscience dieth not and the fire of hell is not quenched.[1] Therefore, my soul, learn by the follies of others and hear thy Lord and Master crying to thee, ' Take heed, and beware of covetousness : for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.' [2] The covetous man gathers and hoards that he may have wherewith to live a long life, but the contrary happens, for when he little thinks it, he dies, and his substance so eagerly gathered together and hoarded up produces the worm which dieth not and kindles the fire which is not quenched. O unhappy, covetous man, didst thou so carefully amass money in order to prepare fuel for the fire of hell, so that it should never go out ? Hear the blessed James in the last part of his Epistle:

[1] St. Mark ix. 48. [2] St. Luke xii. 15.

'Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire.' [1]

Ye indeed, saith blessed James, because ye are rich, think yourselves happy, and ye are called so: but in truth ye are wretched and more wretched than all needy persons, and you have great cause for mourning and lamenting on account of the great miseries which will certainly come upon you: for the superfluous riches which you held fast and which you suffered to become rotten when you should have bestowed them upon the poor, the superfluous garments which you had and which you preferred to see eaten by the moth rather than covering the poor, and the gold and silver which you preferred to see worn away by rust rather than spent upon food for the poor, all these things, I say, will bear witness against you in the day of judgement, and the moths and rust of your riches shall be turned into burning fire which shall forever be devouring your flesh and never consume it, the fire not quenched and the grief never ended. Therefore let us conclude with the royal prophet: fools have said, 'Happy are the people that are in such a case,' namely having riches in abundance; but in truth, 'Blessed are the people who have the Lord for their God.' [2]

[1] St. Jas. v. 1. [2] Ps. cxliv. 15.

FOURTH STEP

CONSIDERATION OF WATERS AND CHIEFLY OF FOUNTAINS

Chapter I

Water cleanseth bodily stains ; God cleanseth spiritual.

WATER holdeth the second place among the elements: and if rightly looked upon, a step may be made of it to assist the heart's ascent towards God. And first let us consider water in general, and afterwards the particular ascent towards God which we learn from wells. Water is moist and cold, and on this account it has, as it were, five properties : it washes and wipes away stains; it quenches fire; refreshes and tempers the heat of thirst; joins many and different things into one whole; and lastly, so low as it sinks, so high will it rise again. All these properties are plain symbols and footsteps of that God who is the Creator of all things.

Water washes off bodily stains ; God washes off those that are spiritual. 'Thou shalt wash me,' says David, 'and I shall be whiter than snow.' For though we say contrition cleanses the heart from sin, that is from stain, and sacraments, priests, almsgiving, and other works of piety, cleanse : yet all these are either the instruments or dispositions, and the author of the cleansing is God alone. 'I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake.'[1] And so the Pharisees, who murmured against Christ, said,

[1] Isa. xliii. 25.

'Who can forgive sins but God alone?'[1] They were not mistaken in attributing to God alone the supreme power of forgiving sins, but they were wrong in not believing Christ to be God, and therefore they were blaspheming and speaking truth at the same time. And not only does God cleanse the stains of the heart after the manner of water, but he wills to be called by the Name: for thus writes Saint John: 'He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.'[2] Therefore the Holy Spirit, who is indeed God, is the living water, and of this water Ezekiel says, 'I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean from all your filthiness.'[3]

And since that heavenly uncreated water far surpasses in power created and earthly water, we will note three differences between the washing of created and uncreated water. First, created water washes the stains of the body, but not all: for there are many which it is powerless to cleanse without the help of soap or other instruments; but uncreated water entirely cleanses all stains; thus we read in a passage shortly before that quoted above, 'And ye shall be cleansed from all your iniquities.' Secondly, created water seldom so wipes away all stains as to leave no trace or mark of the stain; but uncreated water so cleanses that the thing cleansed is made more shining and beautiful than it was before it was defiled. 'Thou shalt wash me,' saith David, 'and I shall be whiter than snow';[4] and the Lord saith by Isaiah, 'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'[5] And

[1] St. Luke v. 21. [2] St. John vii. 38. [3] Ezek. xxxvi. 25.
[4] Ps. li. 9. [5] Isa. i. 18.

lastly, created water cleanses natural stains which do not withstand the person who cleanses; but uncreated water washes away voluntary stains which cannot be washed unless the soul itself be willing, and yields willingly to the cleanser. But so great and admirable is the virtue of this water that it sweetly penetrates hearts of stone: and it is resisted by no hardened heart, but it makes it unable to resist, as Saint Augustine aptly reminds us.

Who can understand, O Lord, how wonderfully thou dost breathe faith into the hearts of the unbelieving, and pourest humility into the hearts of the proud, and instillest charity into the hearts of thine enemies, so that a man who a short time before was breathing threats and slaughter and persecuting thee in the persons of thy disciples, is suddenly changed, and for thy sake and for thy Church willingly bears the threats and blows of persecutors?[1] It is too much for me to penetrate into these thy secrets and I had rather know the efficacy of thy grace by experience than by search. And as I know that that water of thine is a gracious rain, refreshing thine inheritance, as thy prophet sang,[2] I would humbly beseech thee that I may be found in thine inheritance and that it may please thee to cause thy grace to descend upon the soil of my heart, that it continue not as a land without water, dry and barren before thee, such as it is in itself, and unable even to think anything good. But let us pass on to the rest.

CHAPTER 2

Water quenches fire: God quenches the flame of evil desires.

WATER quenches fire, and that heavenly water, namely the grace of the Holy Spirit, in a wondrous manner quenches the fire of carnal desires. Fasting and afflict-

[1] Acts ix. 1. [2] Ps. lxviii. 9.

ing of the body indeed avail much in this quenching, but only when they are used as means of the grace of the Holy Ghost: otherwise of themselves alone they are of no great value. For love it is which controls the affections and movements of the mind; it rules all men, and to it all men submit. Love will not be forced, and if it be hindered in one path it will find a passage by another. Love fears nothing, it ventures everything, conquers all things, thinks nothing hard or impossible for itself: in short, love yields to nothing but a greater or more powerful love. Thus a love altogether carnal, whether it pursues riches or pleasures, yields only to the love of God, and as soon as the water of the Holy Spirit begins to be instilled into the heart of a man, carnal love forthwith begins to cool. Saint Augustine may be our witness, who when he was accustomed to indulge his lust, considered it impossible to do without alliance with a woman: yet when he began to taste the grace of the Holy Spirit he exclaimed: 'How sweet did it at once become to me, to waive the sweetness of those toys! and what I feared to be parted from was now a joy to part with. For thou didst cast them forth from me, thou true and highest sweetness. Thou castedst them forth, and for them enteredst in thyself, sweeter than all pleasure, though not to flesh and blood; brighter than all light, but more hidden than all depths, higher than all honour, but not to the high in their own conceits.' [1]

CHAPTER 3

Water assuages thirst: God satisfies the desires of the heart.

BESIDES this, water slakes thirst: and nothing but that heavenly water can put an end to the various trouble-

[1] *Conf.* ix. 1, trans. Dr. Pusey.

some and wellnigh infinite desires of the human heart. Thus the Truth itself, speaking to the woman of Samaria, taught plainly, 'Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again : but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst.'[1] The case is plainly this, that 'the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.'[2] Nothing that is offered to a man can satisfy his desires, since he is capable of an infinite good, and all created things are circumscribed within certain limits: but he who begins to drink the heavenly water, in which all things exist, seeks for nothing else and desires nothing more. But of this we have spoken above, in our discourse concerning the soul's rest in God as the Creator of its being.

CHAPTER 4

Water unites material things : God accomplishes union of spirits.

WATER joins together and reduces to one such things as it would seem scarcely possible to unite: thus many grains of flour are wrought into one loaf by being mingled with water, and many particles of earth by the addition of water to them are made into bricks. But with far greater ease and permanence doth the water of the Holy Spirit work, making many men to be 'of one heart and of one soul,' which in the book of the Acts of the Apostles[3] is said of the first Christians, upon whom the Holy Ghost had immediately before descended. And the Lord, when about to go to the Father, commends and foretells this unity which the water of the Holy Spirit should accomplish when he said, 'I pray not for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me and I

[1] St. John iv. 13. [2] Eccles. i. 8. [3] Acts iv. 32.

in thee, that they also may be one in us,' and a little after, ' That they may be one, as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one.' [1] And to this unity the Apostle exhorts in the Epistle to the Ephesians, ' Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.' [2] O happy union, which makes many persons to be one body of Christ, which is ruled by one head, eating of the one bread, drinking of one cup, living by one Spirit, and cleaving to God becomes one spirit with him ! [3] What can a servant more desire than to become not only a sharer in all the goods of his Lord, but also to be made one with him in an indissoluble bond of love, one with him the Omnipotent, all-wise, and altogether lovely, Lord ? And this does the grace of the Holy Spirit accomplish, as living and life-giving water, when it is received in a devout heart and preserved with all diligence and care.

CHAPTER 5

When water descends it rises again : the Grace of God as a fountain springs up unto eternal life.

AGAIN, water rises to a height corresponding to the depth to which it has sunk. And since the Holy Spirit comes down from the highest heaven upon earth, so in the man who receives him into his heart, he becomes a ' well of water springing up unto everlasting life,' [4] as the Lord said to the woman of Samaria ; that is to say, when a man is born again of water and the Holy Spirit and bears in his heart that indwelling Spirit, he lifts the fruit of grace up to the point whence that grace descended to him. Therefore, my soul, since thou hast been taught and stirred by the words

[1] St. John xvii. 20. [2] Eph. iv. 3. [3] 1 Cor. x. 16.
[4] St. John iv. 14.

of the Holy Scriptures, do thou again and again, with groans unspeakable, cry to thy Father, 'Give me this water which shall cleanse me from all stain, which shall quench the heat of passion, which shall assuage all thirst, and satisfy every desire': the water which shall make thee one spirit with thy God, which may become in thee a well of water springing up unto life eternal, that thou mayst send on before thee thy good works thither, where thou hopest thyself to dwell for ever.

With good reason did the Son of God say, 'If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?'[1] He did not say, he will give bread, or raiment, or wisdom, or charity, or the kingdom of heaven, or eternal life; but he said, 'he will give the Holy Spirit': for all things are contained in that gift. Cease not then daily to remind the Father of his Son's promise, and say with great devotion and sure hope of obtaining it: Holy Father, I pour forth my prayer to thee, not trusting in mine own righteousness, but in the promise of thine only-begotten Son. It was he who said to us, 'How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?' Assuredly thy Son is the Truth itself and doth not deceive us; therefore fulfil the promise of thy Son who glorified thee upon the earth, and was obedient to thee unto death, 'even the death of the cross.'[2] Give the Holy Spirit unto me who beseech thee, give me the spirit of fear and love, that thy servant may fear nothing but to offend thee, and may love nothing beside thee and his neighbour in thee: 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me: cast me not away from thy presence and take not thy Holy Spirit from me: give me the comfort of thy help again and stablish me with thy free Spirit.'[3]

[1] St. Luke xi. 13. [2] Phil. ii. 8. [3] Ps. li. 10.

CHAPTER 6

The spring of water an image of God as the Fount of being.

I COME now to the likeness to God which we see in springs of water; for thence the mind may rise to contemplate the exceeding and wondrous excellence of the Creator. Not without cause does Holy Scripture speak of God as the 'well of life,'[1] 'the fountain of wisdom,'[2] 'the fountain of living waters.'[3] And that he is the fount of being may be gathered from the words of God himself spoken to Moses,' I am that I am: I am hath sent me unto you.'[4] And all these names the Apostle seems to have gathered into one, when he says, 'In him we live and move and have our being.'[5] For in him we exist as in the fountain of being, in him we live as in the fountain of life, and in him we move as in the fountain of wisdom, for 'Wisdom is more moving than any motion: she passeth and goeth through all things by reason of her pureness.'[6]

Here among ourselves, water has this quality, namely, that from it rivers spring, and if they cease to draw from their source they gradually become dry: but the spring itself is not dependent on rivers because it does not receive its waters from them, but holds them in itself, and shares them with others. This is a true symbol and picture of the Divinity, for God is the very true fountain of being: he receives being from no other, and all things receive their being from him: God receives his being from no other because the Essence of God is his existence and his existence is his Essence, so that it can neither happen nor be conceived that God should not always have existed, or that he will not always exist. Other things may

[1] Ps. xxxvi. 9. [2] Ecclus. i. 5. [3] Jer. ii. 13.
[4] Exod. iii. 14. [5] Acts xvii. 28. [6] Wisd. vii. 24.

exist for a time, and a while after cease to be; since existence does not of necessity belong to their essence: as, for example, from the nature of man, since man is a reasonable creature, he cannot be a man without being a reasonable creature : and if existence were of the essence of a man, it would be impossible that he should not always exist, but since existence is not of the essence of his being, it is possible for him both to exist and not to exist. God is the fount of being because in his own Essence is included the act of always existing. And this is signified by the words, 'I am that I am,'[1] that is, I am Being Itself and I receive not my Being from any other, but I have it within myself: to me alone it belongs that my Essence is to be. And hence it is that eternity and immortality are proper to God, as the Apostle saith, 'To the King eternal, immortal, the only God,'[2] and 'Who only hath immortality.'[3] And indeed all other things receive their being from God, so that unless they are always in dependence on him and preserved by a certain inflow from him, they must forthwith come to naught: hence the same Apostle saith that 'He bears all things along by the word of his power,'[4] because unless created things are sustained by God they cease to exist. Therefore, my soul, consider and wonder at the infinite goodness of thy Maker, who so lovingly bears up and preserves all things, though he himself needs them not, and wonder no less at the patience of thy Creator, and imitate it, since 'He is so kind to the unthankful and to the evil,'[5] that he sustains those who blaspheme him and preserves those who deserve to be brought to naught, and let it not seem to thee burdensome if thou art sometimes required to bear the infirmities of thy brethren, and to do good to them that hate thee.

[1] Exod. iii. 14. [2] 1 Tim. i. 17. [3] ibid., vi. 16.
[4] Heb. i. 3. [5] St. Luke vi. 35.

But the pre-eminence of him that is the fountain of being does not consist only in receiving his being from no other fountain and in communicating being to all other things. Waters of springs and waters of rivers are of the same nature, and although the waters of springs do not receive their waters from other springs, they yet have some other causes of their being, namely mists, and they again have other causes, until we reach the final Cause, which is God. Now, my soul, God is thy Creator, and his Being is not of the same kind as the being of created things, but is separated from them by an infinite distance of dignity and nobility and excellence, and he is truly and really the fountain of being, but he is wholly without any cause.

A well of created water, as was said, is not derived from other water, yet it is from another source: the uncreated fountain of being has nothing before himself, depends on nothing, lacks nothing: nothing can hurt him, but all things depend upon him and he is able to extinguish all created things and 'at a beck can cast down all the world' as the most valiant Maccabeus says.[1] Admire, O my soul, this pre-eminence, this beginning without beginning, cause without cause, infinite, boundless, immense, and absolutely necessary Being, since all other things in comparison with him are mere contingencies.

And perchance it was of him that the Truth himself spake,' One thing only is necessary,'[2] therefore cleave unto him alone, serve him alone, take thy delight in the love and desire of him alone: in comparison with him despise all other things, or at least do not disturb thyself with care about much business, seeing but one thing is necessary for thee, and that will suffice for thyself and for all others; let this one care be thine, that thou never fall from his grace, and study always and everywhere to please him.

[1] 2 Macc. viii. 18. [2] St. Luke x. 42.

CHAPTER 7

God the fountain of life has life in himself.

AND in truth we most rightly say that God is the fountain of life, for he lives and has life in himself, yea is himself eternal life. 'This is the true God and eternal life,' saith Saint John,[1] and all things that live receive life from that fountain, and if he ceased to bestow life they would fail and turn again into their dust as the holy prophet David says.[2]

To beget a being like unto oneself is a property of living beings. God begets his Son, wholly like unto himself, God God, and the Living One the Living One: for 'as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself,' as Saint John witnesseth in his Gospel.[3] Now the Father hath life in himself because he is the fountain of life and receiveth life from no other: and he hath given to the Son to have life in himself, because he hath given him the same life which he himself hath, and for this reason the Son also is a fountain of life, but a fountain of life from the fountain of life, as he is God from God, and Light from Light. Who can explain, nay, who can conceive, what that life of God is, and what is that fountain of life in which living things in earth and in heaven have their source? Life as it is known to us in this state of exile is nothing else than an inward principle of movement: for those things are said by us to be alive which in some way move themselves; and for this reason we commonly speak of the waters of rivers as living waters, and those in pools as dead, since the former appear to be moved of themselves and the latter cannot move unless they be driven by winds, or by some other external force. Thy God, O my soul, doth most truly live, and he is the author and

[1] 1 St. John v. 20. [2] Ps. civ. 29. [3] St. John v. 26.

the fountain of life. For he himself impresses this truth on us in many passages of Holy Scripture: 'I live, saith the Lord'; [1] and the prophets often repeat, 'As the Lord liveth'; [2] and God, lamenting over his people, saith, 'They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters.' [3] And nevertheless he neither moves, nor is he moved by any other: 'I am God, I change not,' [4] and elsewhere, 'God is not the son of man that he should repent.' [5] And in the Church's hymn which we say daily :—

> O God, Creation's secret force,
> Thyself unmoved, all motion's source,
> Who from the morn till evening's ray,
> Through all its changes guid'st the day.[6]

And though God begets the Son, he begets him without changing; and although he sees, hears, speaks, loves, pities, judges, it is without moving that he does all these things; and although he creates and preserves things or, on the contrary, destroys and scatters them, and again renews and changes them, yet he himself works resting and changes things while himself unmoved.

How then doth he live if he moveth not, and how can he not live if he is the fountain and author of life? This difficulty is easily removed. For to be alive it is quite sufficient for the living thing to act of itself and not to be moved by another: for the most part, life in created things is a principle of internal movement, because created things are imperfect and need many things in order that they may fulfil the functions of life, but God is infinite perfection and needs nothing outside himself: he acts of himself and is not moved by another, and he has no need of movement or change. Created things need change that they may generate and be generated; because they beget outside

[1] Num. xiv. 28. [2] 2 Kings iii. 14. [3] Jer. ii. 13.
[4] Mal. iii. 6. [5] Num. xxiii. 19. [6] *Brev. Rom.* None.

themselves and the thing which is begotten must be changed from not being into being: but God begets the Son within himself, and within himself produces the Holy Spirit. The Son needs not to undergo change, nor is the Holy Spirit changed from not being to being, because they receive that being that always was; and that they receive not in time but in eternity. Created things need movement for increase, because they are born imperfect: but God the Son is born most perfect, and God the Holy Ghost is breathed forth also and produced most perfect.

Created things need the movement of alteration, that they may obtain the various qualities of which they are in need: but God is in need of nothing, seeing his Essence is absolute perfection.

Created things require to move from place to place, because they are not everywhere: but God is wholly everywhere.

Besides this, created things need many things in order to see, hear, speak, or work, because though indeed they have a certain life, yet it is imperfect and very poor: but God needs nothing outside himself in order to see and hear all things, to speak or to work all things in all; because he has not only life, but life most rich and happy, and he himself is life and the fountain of life.

Let us take an example in the act of seeing: in order that a man may see he needs power of vision which is distinct from the soul which properly lives: he needs an object, some coloured body placed outside himself: he needs sunlight or else light from some other luminous body: he needs a medium, that is a clearly-marked object: he needs a sensible species which can be drawn from the object to his sight: he needs the bodily organ, that is the eye, made of various humours and fleshy membranes: he needs sensitive spirits, and optic nerves through which those spirits

may pass: he needs distance duly proportioned: he needs the application of power.

See how many minute things men and other creatures need that they may accomplish one vital action: but God, who in truth holds all life within himself, is in need of nothing at all: his infinite Essence is for him power, object, species, light, and all things else of himself, by himself, and in himself. God sees all things that are, that have been, that will be; and what they can be he clearly knows: and before the world was, God saw all things and nothing new has increased his knowledge or vision by the creation of all things. What therefore shalt thou be, O my soul, when thou art a partaker of his life? What great demand did God make upon thee when he bid thee lay down that bodily, animal life, imperfect as it is, and needy, lay it down for thy brethren and for God himself, that thou mayst become partaker of an eternal life most rich and blissful? And if this command to despise life is not a great demand, how slight and small it should seem to thee to be bidden to bestow freely thy dead riches on the poor, and to abstain from carnal pleasures, truly to renounce the devil and his pomps, and to yearn with the whole affection of thy heart after that life which alone is the true life.

CHAPTER 8

God the fountain of wisdom.

IT is now time for us to ascend, in such manner as we are able, to the fountain of wisdom. 'The word of God most high is the fountain of wisdom,'[1] and he rightly says 'most high,' or 'in the highest': for the fountain of wisdom flows down most abundantly and richly upon the holy angels and the souls of the blessed dwelling in heaven; but to us who are wanderers in

[1] Ecclus. i. 5.

the desert, it is not so much wisdom itself that comes, but as it were an effluence or fragrance of wisdom. Wherefore, my soul, seek not after higher things than it becomes thee to seek, 'Scan not the majesty lest thou be oppressed by the glory.'[1] Marvel at the wisdom of him of whom the Apostle speaks as the only wise God.[2]

Congratulate those happy souls who drink of the fountain of wisdom, and although they do not comprehend God, because his Being is the fountain of wisdom, yet they see the face of God, that is of the first cause, without any veil, and illuminated by his splendour, they rightly judge concerning all things, and in that noonday light of wisdom they fear not the darkness of error, nor the obscurity of ignorance, nor the dimness of opinions.

Aspire to that bliss, and that thou mayst safely attain to it, love the Lord Jesus Christ with all thy heart; in him are all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God:[3] and he himself said in the Gospel, 'He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him.'[4] And what is that 'I will manifest myself to him' but, I will manifest all the treasures of the knowledge and wisdom of God which are hidden in myself? Most certainly all men naturally desire knowledge, and though at the present time many persons find a certain satisfaction in worldly pleasures, yet when we lay down the body which is corruptible and now weighs down the soul, we shall find the fire of this desire for knowledge blazes above all other desires. How great then will be thy happiness, O soul, when Christ thy Lover and thy Beloved shall show thee all the treasures of the knowledge and the wisdom of God! But in order that thou be not defrauded of so great a hope, be diligent

[1] Prov. xxv. 27, Vulg. [2] Rom. xvi. 27. [3] Col. ii. 3.
[4] St. John xiv. 21.

in keeping the commandments of Christ: for he hath said, 'If a man love me, he will keep my words, . . . and he that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings.' [1] And in the meanwhile let thy wisdom be that which holy Job describes, 'The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.' [2] And what good soever thou seest in creatures, know that it flows down from God, the fountain of all goodness, and so with blessed Francis learn to taste of the fount of all good in each created thing, even though it be but in small streams.

Concerning this matter read the ninth chapter of Saint Bonaventura's life of Saint Francis.

[1] St. John xiv. 23. [2] Job xxviii. 28.

FIFTH STEP

CONSIDERATION OF THE AIR

Chapter I

The body lives by breathing air, the soul by praying.

IF we consider the nature of the element of air we find it to be a remarkable instructor of good conduct, not only for the teaching of moral philosophy, but also in sacred theology, for the unfolding of mysteries and raising the mind to God. So let attention be given to the various advantages which, by the ordering of providence, accrue to the human race through air.

First of all, since air serves for breathing it preserves the life of animals and men upon earth. In the next place, it is so far necessary for the use of eyes, ears, and tongue, that if perchance it be withdrawn, even if we have all other things, every one would by degrees become blind, deaf, and dumb. And lastly, so greatly is air needed for the movements of men and other animals, that were it withdrawn, all movement would be hindered, and all the arts and almost all the works of men would of necessity cease. To begin with the first.

If men understood that respiration is needed for their souls no less than for their bodies, many would be saved who are now perishing. The body is in need of continual respiration, for the natural heat which causes the heart to beat is tempered by the help of the lungs which inhale the cold and exhale the heated air, so that life is maintained which without this respiration cannot be preserved ; and for this reason it is a com-

monly accepted fact that living and breathing are one and the same, since every one who breathes lives, and he who leaves off breathing, ceases also to live. And thou, O my soul, art in need of constant respiration in order to live the spiritual life which is the grace of God, and this consists in sending forth fervent sighs to God by prayer and receiving from God fresh supplies of the Holy Spirit. And this is signified by those words of the Lord that 'men ought always to pray and not to faint';[1] it behoves thee always to be breathing and receiving the good Spirit that the spiritual life in thee be not extinguished; and this he repeats, saying, 'Watch ye therefore and pray always.'[2] And the Apostle confirms this in his former Epistle to the Thessalonians, saying, 'Pray without ceasing';[3] and the Apostle Peter is in agreement with him when he writes, 'Be ye therefore sober[4] and watch unto prayer.'[5]

And it is indeed true wisdom that we who stand in need of the help of God at all times, should at all times seek it. Our Father indeed knows what things we have need of, and is ready to supply them bountifully, especially such things as pertain to our eternal salvation; but he wills to bestow them by the means of prayer, because this is more honouring to him and of more benefit to us than if he gave all things to those who sleep and do nothing. And so our most bounteous Lord exhorts and urges us to ask when he says, 'I say unto you, ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you; for every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.'[6] And what that is which is specially to be asked for, and which will without doubt be given, he explains a little after, saying, 'If ye then, being evil,

[1] St. Luke xviii. 1. [2] ibid., xxi. 36. [3] 1 Thess. v. 17.
[4] Vulg. *prudentes*. [5] 1 St. Pet. iv. 7. [6] St. Luke xi. 9.

know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?'[1] This therefore is what we must chiefly and earnestly ask for, and which will without doubt be given us, if properly sought, namely the Holy Spirit, through whom we have respiration in God, and so preserve our spiritual life; as holy David did, who said in the Psalm, 'I opened my mouth and drew in spirit';[2] that is, I opened my mouth by desire, by sighs, beseeching with groans unutterable, and I drew in the most sweet breath of the Spirit of God, which cooled the heat of evil desires and established me in every good work.

This being the case, who will say that those persons who spend whole days, even months and years, without sighing after God and without drawing in breath from him are living according to God? For not to breathe is a sure sign of death, and if to breathe is to pray, not to pray is a sign of death. The spiritual life by which we are the children of God consists in love: 'Behold,' saith Saint John in his Epistle, 'what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.'[3] And who is there that loves and does not desire to see the person whom he loves? Who is there that desires and does not seek the object he desires from him who he knows will give it if he be asked? He then who does not earnestly pray that he may behold the face of his God doth not desire to see him: and he who desireth not, loveth not: he who loveth not, liveth not. Does it not therefore follow that we must consider those to be dead to God, though in the world they are counted living, who do not give themselves seriously to the work of prayer? Moreover, a man who breathes and lives cannot be said to be truly praying if he pours forth prayers with the bodily voice alone: for wise men define prayer to be

[1] St. Luke xi. 13. [2] Ps. cxix. 131. [3] 1 St. John iii. 1.

not the lifting up of the voice into the air, but the uprising of the mind to God.

Therefore, my soul, make no mistake, and do not think that thou art alive in God if thou art not earnestly seeking him with thy whole heart and sighing after him day and night. Say not that thou art hindered by other occupations from divine converse and hast no leisure for prayer: for the holy Apostles were always occupied, and that too in the work of God and the salvation of souls, insomuch that one of them said, 'Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?'; [1] and yet this same Apostle, besides the frequent mention of his own prayers, writes to the Philippians, 'Our conversation is in heaven,' because even in the midst of business he was living in heaven by desire, and never forgot him whom he loved, otherwise he could not say, 'I am crucified with Christ. I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' [2]

CHAPTER 2

The air considered to be the means by which men live, hear, and speak.

ANOTHER property of air is that it is the medium by which the various kinds of colours reach our eyes, all manner of sounds reach our ears, and without which we could neither see nor hear and not even speak. On which account we ought first of all to thank God for that he has willed to endow our nature with so remarkable a benefit. Next it behoves us to admire the wisdom of our Creator in a work of such great subtilty and delicacy that the air has real body and is so extensive that it fills a space wellnigh measureless, and

[1] 2 Cor. xi. 28. [2] Gal. ii. 20.

yet it is not seen, nor is it felt, by reason of its extreme rarity. The ancient world marvelled at the fineness of one line which Apelles drew with his pencil; but that line could be seen and touched and could in no respect be compared with the fineness of this most slender veil, which surrounds all men, touches all men, yet by reason of its exceeding thinness is discerned by none. But our wonder is increased when we perceive that though the air is most subtile and so very fine, yet when it is cut it is with the greatest ease joined again and closed as though it had never been cut. A broken spider's web or a very fine veil when broken cannot be so mended by any artist that the former rent no longer shows. And to this we may add, and it is a fact most worthy of admiration and proper to the wisdom of God alone, that innumerable varieties of colours pass at the same time, without mingling, through the same part of air. Who is there who when placed in an open and high spot at night and in the moonlight, can gaze at the stars in the sky, the fields on the earth filled with flowers, and at the same time see the houses, trees, animals, and many other things, and deny that the forms of all these things are contained by that part of the air which is near him and at the same time are so contained as not to intermix with one another? And who can understand, who can comprehend this? For how can it be that a substance so very fine should contain at one time such a great variety of objects? Moreover, when at the same time and place the song of birds on the one hand, and on another various musical instruments or the murmur of falling waters are heard, is it not a matter of necessity that those various colours, those sounds and various kinds of sounds, should be received at one and the same time in that very air which receives so many forms of colours?

Who accomplishes this, my soul, but thy Maker,

'who only doeth wondrous things';[1] and if his works are so wonderful, how much more wonderful will he himself be?

But there is another use for this wondrous subtilty in the air, namely that it does not hinder, but assists the motion of all things which pass from place to place. We all know the great labour which is needed to draw ships through the water, although this is liquid and easily parted: sometimes indeed neither wind nor oars are sufficient, but it becomes necessary to use in addition the forces of horses or oxen. And if perchance roads have to be opened through mountains or hills, what great labour and what length of time are needed to open a way, however short. And horses run, birds fly, without labour, indeed with the greatest ease, through the air; darts and missiles are shot; and in their various duties men go up and down, walk about, run to and fro, move their feet, arms, hands, upwards, downwards, to the right and to the left: and the air spreading on all sides hinders them no more than if it were not of a bodily but of a spiritual nature, or even than if it were nothing at all.

CHAPTER 3

In the air there is manifest a certain image of the sweetness and kindness of God.

LASTLY, we may add that the air by nature so yields itself to everything and changes according to every shape, and suffers itself to be cut and broken through, in order to serve the convenience of man, that it seems to be given to man as a teacher of humility, patience, and charity. But, my soul, the thought that should strongly stir and kindle the love of thy Creator is this: that this very air represents the amazing sweetness

[1] Ps. cxxxvi. 4.

and exceeding loving-kindness of the Creator towards mankind.

Collect thyself, I pray thee, O soul, and consider attentively, that thy Lord is always present in all his creatures, that he works with all, and in a manner infinitely tender, accommodates his work to the nature of each one, as if he were to say with the Apostle, 'I became all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.'[1] With necessary agents he co-operates that they may act according to need: he co-operates with voluntary agents that they may act voluntarily: with free agents that they may act with freedom.

So he moves the fire and bids it ascend: the earth, and bids it remain beneath: water, and bids it slide along sloping places: the air, and bids it pass whithersoever it is driven: the stars, and bids them circle continually in their orbits: he bids the grass, shrubs, and plants to bring forth fruit according to their own nature; and creatures of the earth, the air, and the water, to do what their nature requires of them.

And if the sweetness of God thus so appears in co-operating with his creatures in the works of nature, what may we suppose does he in the works of grace? God indeed bestowed upon man free will, yet in such a way that he might control him by rule, terrify him with destruction, and allure him with kindness. 'God will have all men to be saved';[2] but he wills it in such a manner that they should also will it, and therefore he sweetly goes before them, incites them onwards, leads them and guides them, in a marvellous way. These are the contrivances of the Wisdom of God, of which Isaiah speaks: 'Declare his doings among the people.'[3] And indeed at one time he greatly terrifies the wicked, at another lovingly exhorts them, now gently warns, now corrects in pity, in such a manner as he sees to be right for their mind and character.

[1] 1 Cor. ix. 22. [2] 1 Tim. ii. 4. [3] Isa. xii. 4.

Hear how gently the Lord dealt with the first sinner: 'Adam,' saith he, 'where art thou?' and when he answered 'I heard thy voice in the garden and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself,' the Lord went on with the same gentleness, 'Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat?'[1] And Adam, warned by this gentle correction, doubtless repented, as the Scripture saith, 'She' (namely the Wisdom of God) 'preserved the first formed father of the world, that was created alone, and brought him out of his fall.'[2]

Hear again how tenderly and sweetly he corrected by his angel, and invited all the children of Israel to repentance: an angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to the place of weeping and said, 'I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you into the land which I sware unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you. And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this? . . . When the angel of the Lord spake these words unto all the children of Israel the people lifted up their voices and wept. And they called the name of that place Bochim [i.e. weepers]; and they sacrificed there unto the Lord.'[3] Now that the weeping was very great and universal and a sign of true penitence, is evinced by the new name given to the place, an everlasting memorial to posterity, namely that the place should be called 'the place of weeping, or of tears.'

What shall I now say of the prophets? In all their sermons surely it is this that they proclaim, that 'God willeth not the death of sinners, but that they should be converted and live.'[4] 'They say,' saith the holy Jeremiah, 'If a man put away his wife and she go

[1] Gen. iii. 9. [2] Wisd. x. 1. [3] Judges ii. 1. [4] Ezek. xviii. 23.

from him and become another man's, shall he return to her again? Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers, yet return again to me, saith the Lord.'[1]

And by Ezekiel, 'Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?'[2]

But leaving aside the wicked, the greatness of the kindness and sweetness of the Lord our God towards us, more than that of a father or mother, towards those who fear him and who hope in him, can in no way be expressed. David says in the Psalms, 'Look how high the heaven is in comparison of the earth: so great is his mercy also toward them that fear him'; and again, 'The merciful goodness of the Lord endureth for ever and ever upon them that fear him';[3] and in another place, 'O taste, and see, how gracious the Lord is: blessed is the man that trusteth in him';[4] and again, 'Truly God is loving unto Israel, even unto such as are of a clean heart':[5] that is, who can set forth the goodness, the graciousness and sweetness of God towards devout and righteous souls? The Lord also said by Isaiah, 'Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee';[6] and Jeremiah in the Lamentations, 'The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.'[7]

And if I wished to add what the Apostles teach in

[1] Jer. iii. 1. [2] Ezek. xxxiii. 10. [3] Ps. ciii. 17. [4] Ps. xxxiv. 8. [5] Ps. lxxiii. 1. [6] Isa. xlix. 15. [7] Lam. iii. 24.

their Epistles concerning the fatherly mercies of the Lord our God towards men, I should never make an end. Let this one passage suffice for all, where the Apostle Paul writes at the beginning of his second letter to the Corinthians, 'Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble.'[1] He does not say that God is a comforter, but the God most full of all comfort: he does not say, 'who comforteth us in some tribulation,' but 'in all': nor is it that we may comfort those who are in some trouble, but those who are in 'any trouble': he could not more fully express how sweet and gracious God is towards those whom he loves and by whom he is beloved.

There remains at the last to quote the words of Saint Prosper in which he declares the kindness of God not only towards the good but also towards the evil, that he may make them good.

'Grace,' he says, 'is chiefly remarkable in persuading by exhortations, in admonishing by examples, in deterring by dangers, in spurring on by wonders, in bestowing understanding, in inspiring counsel, in illuminating the heart and seasoning it with the affections of faith. But the will of man acts in subordination to and in conjunction with this grace, being stirred up by the aforesaid aids to co-operate with the work of God in itself and begin to reach out to the reward, and if it fails, laying the failure to its own changefulness; if it prosper, counting the prosperity as a favour bestowed by grace. And the favour is bestowed upon all in numberless ways, some hidden, some manifest: and if many are refused it, it is owing to their own wickedness, and if many receive it, it is of divine grace and the human will.'[2]

[1] 2 Cor. i. 3. [2] Prosper, *de Vocat. Gent.* ii, *c.* 26.

CHAPTER 4

Exhortation to the soul to imitate the kindness of God.

SEE now, my soul, if thy Creator is so sweet and gentle towards his servants, and suffers sinners with such amazing kindness that he may convert them: and if he so consoles the righteous that he may increase their righteousness and holiness: shouldst thou not bear kindly with thy neighbours, and become all things to all men, that thou mayst win all to thy Lord and God?

Consider with thyself to what high degree of excellence the Apostle exhorts thee when he says, 'Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children: and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.' [1]

Imitate God the Father, 'who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.' [2]

Imitate God the Son, who, taking human nature for our sake, spared not his own life that he might snatch us from the power of darkness and from everlasting death.

Imitate God the Holy Ghost, who freely pours forth his most precious gifts that he may make us who are carnal to be truly spiritual.

[1] Eph. v. 1. [2] St. Matt. v. 45.

SIXTH STEP

CONSIDERATION OF FIRE

Chapter I

The hatred of God for sin is as a consuming fire.

FIRE is an element so pure and noble that God has willed to call himself by that name according to what Moses and Paul affirm, ' Our God is a consuming fire '; [1] and when first God appeared to Moses, he willed to be seen in the fire which seized on the bush and yet did not consume it : ' And the angel of the Lord appeared,' saith Moses, ' in a flame of fire in the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.' [2] And when God came to give the law to his people, he came in the likeness of fire; for thus saith the same Moses, ' And Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire.' [3] In like manner, when the new law was to be promulgated, the Holy Spirit appeared unto the Apostles in tongues of fire. And lastly, those who are nearest to God in heaven, the seraphim, that is the fiery ones, are so called because from that divine and most burning fire they receive fervour and ardour beyond all other angels.

From these truths it is not difficult, considering the element of fire, its nature, and properties, to form therewith for ourselves a step by which, with the help of prayer and meditation, we may rise up to God: indeed it will be easier to ascend with Elijah in a

[1] Deut. iv. 14; Heb. xii. 29. [2] Exod. iii. 2. [3] ibid., xix. 18.

chariot of fire than to form a ladder from either earth, water, or air.

Let us therefore proceed to consider the properties of fire. The nature of fire is such that in different things it acts in different and often in contrary ways: it forthwith consumes wood, hay, or stubble: gold, silver, precious stones it purifies and makes more beautiful: iron, which naturally is black, cold, hard, and heavy, is transformed by fire, its qualities are changed, and it is gradually rendered clear, hot, soft, and light, so that it shines like a star, burns as fire, dissolves like water, and becomes so light that a blacksmith can very easily move and lift it.

All these things manifestly correspond with the working of God. And first, according to the Apostle in the former Epistle to the Corinthians, wood, hay, stubble signify evil deeds which cannot stand the fire of the divine judgement.[1] And we can hardly believe how sorely all sins displease God who is most pure fire, and with what zeal he consumes and destroys them, if so be they can be destroyed by patience, that is, if he who has sinned is in a condition to do penance: for all sins are remitted by penitence. But if the sinner is incapable of penitence, as are devils and men who have passed out of this life, the divine wrath of God is turned upon the wicked themselves, 'For the ungodly and his ungodliness are both alike hateful to God,' saith the Wise Man.[2] And how real and severe this hatred is, the devil is a witness, who once sinned and when he was the most noble angel and, as Saint Gregory testifies, the chief of the first order of angels and the most glorious of the beings created by God, yet was cast out of heaven and despoiled of all supernatural grace and glory and changed into a hideous monster and enslaved to eternal destruction. Christ is also witness, who came down from heaven to destroy the

[1] 1 Cor. iii. 12. [2] Wisd. xiv. 9.

works of the devil, that is sin,[1] and is therefore called 'the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world.'[2] But who is able to declare or even to conceive the sufferings he bore, that the justice of God might be completely satisfied? 'Who, being in the form of God, took upon him the form of a servant';[3] 'who, though he was rich, yet for your sakes became poor';[4] who had 'not where to lay his head';[5] and though he himself had made heaven and earth yet 'came unto his own and his own received him not';[6] who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously; 'who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree.'[7] 'He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,'[8] 'by whose stripes ye were healed';[9] and at last bound, spitted on, scourged, crowned with thorns and crucified with extreme insults and greatest agony, poured forth all his blood and life, and he bore all these things that he might destroy the works of the devil and blot out our sins. The law of God is witness, which forbids all sin and punishes it, and leaves not even an idle word unpunished.[10] And how great must be his hatred of crimes and evil deeds, who cannot endure an idle word? 'The commandment of the Lord is pure and giveth light unto the eyes':[11] he turns away from stains and darkness; there can be no communion between light and darkness, nor between righteousness and iniquity.[12]

And lastly, hell is witness, for God prepared it for the wicked, and for sinners who, when they might have been washed in the Blood of the immaculate Lamb, either refused or despised it: for it is just that

1 1 St. John iii. 8. 2 St. John i. 29. 3 Phil. ii. 6.
4 2 Cor. viii. 9. 5 St. Luke ix. 58. 6 St. John i. 11.
7 1 St. Pet. ii. 24. 8 Phil. ii. 8. 9 1 St. Pet. ii. 24.
10 St. Matt. xii. 36. 11 Ps. xix. 8. 12 2 Cor. vi. 14.

where sin is eternal the punishment should be eternal: but what is the kind of punishment and how great, it is terrible to think. Of this matter we will speak further when we come to the last step in our ladder.

Therefore, my soul, seeing that the hatred of God against sin is so great, if thou lovest God above all things, thou shouldst also hate sin above all things. Take heed lest thou be deceived by persons who extenuate or excuse sins, see that thou art not deceived by their false reasonings. If thou art not displeased by sin in thyself and in others, thou dost not love God: and if thou dost not love God, thou art lost. Again, if thou be not ungrateful to Christ, how much thou shouldst think thyself indebted to his love, his labours, his Blood, and his death, who hath washed thee from thy sin and reconciled thee to his Father: and will it be grievous unto thee to suffer something for Christ, or for his sake, and by his grace to strive against sin even unto blood ?

And lastly, if thou canst not endure the hell of eternal fire, neither shouldst thou endure sin in any form : but rather turn aside from it and from the slightest suspicion of it, as thou wouldst shun the face of a serpent. Make, then, a firm and steadfast resolve to hate sin above all things and to love God above all things.

CHAPTER 2

Fire perfects the more precious metals and God crowns the good works of man.

FIRE indeed doth not destroy, but perfects and makes more bright and glistering gold, silver, and precious stones, since (as the Apostle explains) those metals signify good and perfect works which are approved by the fire of the divine justice, and will receive a great

reward.[1] Those works God proves because they are his gifts, and when he crowns our merits, says Saint Augustine, he crowns his own gifts.[2] They were done at his bidding and by his own aid, by his bounteous gift of power to accomplish them, and directed by the law given by him, and according to the rules prescribed by him. Now gold signifies works of charity, and how should not works of charity be specially pleasing to God, when God himself is Love![3] Silver signifies works of wisdom, namely of those who turn many to righteousness,[4] and that these things also are greatly approved by God and are pleasing to him, the Wisdom of God declares, 'He that shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.'[5]

Precious stones are the works of the chaste soul, of whom it is said, 'Her continent mind cannot be valued,'[6] and this is the reason why in the Church's office in praise of holy virgins there is read the Gospel of the finding of the one pearl of great price. And we may learn how pleasing to God is the purity of virgins, from the prophet Isaiah, who in the name of God foretold to eunuchs, namely to those who 'have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake':[7] 'Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters. I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.'[8] Saint Augustine in his book on holy virginity shows that this passage is to be understood of holy virgins, both men and women.[9]

There are three particular works which in the united opinion of the doctors merit an aureole in the kingdom

[1] 1 Cor. iii. 13. [2] Aug. *Enarr. in Ps. lxx, Serm.* 2, *n.* 5.
[3] 1 St. John iv. 8. [4] Dan. xii. 3. [5] St. Matt. v. 19.
[6] Ecclus. xxvi. 15; Vulg.: 'Omni ponderatio non est digna continentis animae.'
[7] St. Matt. xix. 12. [8] Isa. lvi. 5.
[9] Aug. *de Sancta Virginitate, cc.* 24 and 25.

of heaven: *aureoles*, crowns of gold, that is special rewards in addition to eternal life, are given to martyrs, doctors, and virgins: to martyrs by reason of the excellence of their love, for 'greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends';[1] to doctors for their excellent wisdom, of whom Daniel says, 'They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever';[2] to virgins because of their incomparable chastity, for which cause the virgins in the Apocalypse are said to be singing the new song, which no other can sing: 'These are they,' saith Saint John, 'which were not defiled with women, for they are virgins, and they follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.'[3]

But it is not only the charity of martyrs, or the wisdom of doctors, or the purity of virgins that will be proved by the fire of divine justice and receive a full reward; but all other kinds of good works, wrought in charity, will be reckoned among the vessels of gold and will endure the divine fire and receive their own reward. For in the last judgement the Lord will say, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,'[4] to those who gave bread to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, shelter to the stranger, clothing to the naked, comfort to the sick and to those cast into prison. And that no one should be without a reward, the Lord even promised the same to any one who out of love should give even a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple.[5]

Dost thou understand, O soul, what a difference there is between some works and others? What course could be more foolish and wretched than if, being in a certain place and at a time in which thou couldst with slight labour gather together gold, silver, and precious stones, thou shouldst prefer, at great

[1] St. John xv. 13. [2] Dan. xii. 3. [3] Apoc. xiv. 4.
[4] St. Matt. xxv. 34. [5] ibid., x. 42.

cost and hard labour, to collect wood, hay, and stubble? O that thou wast wise and didst understand and wouldst consider the latter end,[1] for at the last all these things will be searched by the fire of the divine judgement, and will be proved, and the former things be praised and crowned, the latter burnt and reduced to ashes and smoke. Why choose now what thou wilt certainly repent of having chosen? And why not contemn now, when it is serviceable so to do, that which after a short time thou wilt contemn to no profit? And if perchance thou dost not now perceive those distant things, and thine eyesight is clouded by the veil of things present, so that thou dost not gaze upon the clear truth, pray to God and with great longing say to him with the blind man in the Gospel, 'Lord, that I may receive my sight';[2] or with the prophet, 'Open thou mine eyes that I may see the wondrous things of thy law':[3] for it is indeed an altogether wonderful thing that works done in charity should become gold, silver, and precious stones, while works not done in charity are turned into dry wood, hay, and stubble.

CHAPTER 3

Fire makes black iron to become bright: God leads a sinful soul to the knowledge of the truth.

LET us now come to the consideration of a second property of fire. Hitherto we have been learning from fire how God works in those who depart this life with evil works, or in those who come to the end of life full of good works. Now by another similitude borrowed in like manner from fire, we may understand what God works in those whom he calls from sin to penitence.

[1] Deut. xxxii. 29; Ecclus. vii. 26. [2] St. Luke xviii. 41.
[3] Ps. cxix. 18.

A sinner is like iron which at a distance from the fire remains black, cold, hard, and heavy: but if perchance it be placed in the fire, it becomes shining, soft, hot, and light. Every sinner lacks interior light and walks in darkness, and in this resembleth the blackness of iron, for though he is not only skilful in human knowledge and business, but also apparently esteemed for his good judgement: yet in the matter of discerning between the true good and true evil he is blind and more wretched than any blind man. For a blind man sees naught, and therefore cannot move without a guide : but the sinner thinks he sees what he does not see, or mistakes one thing for another and thinks good evil and evil good, the great small and the small great, the long to be short and the short long, and for this reason is continually mistaken in his choice.

It is this which the Apostle speaks of concerning the idolatrous Gentiles, 'Having the understanding darkened . . . through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart';[1] and this it is with which the Lord himself in the Gospel so often upbraids the Scribes and Pharisees who were blind leaders of the blind.[2] It is this which the prophet Isaiah said to the Jews of his time, 'Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see';[3] and to those to whom he preached the coming of Christ, who should open the eyes of the blind, and speaking concerning the new Covenant, in the Person of God, he adds, 'I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not ; I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them and crooked things straight.'[4]

And lastly, will not the wicked acknowledge so much, after this life when punishment has begun to open their eyes which had been closed by sin ? They

[1] Eph. iv. 18. [2] St. Matt. xv. 14; St. Luke vi. 39.
[3] Isa. xlii. 18. [4] ibid., xlii. 16.

will say, 'Therefore have we erred from the way of truth, and the light of righteousness hath not shined unto us, and the sun of righteousness rose not upon us.'[1]

And it is no wonder that they who have turned away from God in heart and will are blind: for 'God is light, and in him is no darkness at all';[2] and from this the same Apostle concludes, 'He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now,' and a little later, 'He that hateth his brother is in darkness and walketh in darkness and knoweth not whither he goeth, because the darkness hath blinded his eyes.'[3]

Now the blindness in sinners is not caused only by their turning away from God, who is light: but also 'their own wickedness hath blinded them,' as Wisdom saith:[4] for the passions of the mind, love, hate, wrath, envy, and the rest, which are included under the name of wickedness, so blind the mind that it cannot clearly see the truth; just in the same way as coloured spectacles cause white objects to appear red, or spectacles made in a particular way cause small objects to appear large or large objects to appear small, those very distant to be near and those near to be far off.

He who ardently loves, loves a thing which is very beautiful and very good, and so much the more as he considers it to be necessary for himself, and in comparison with it everything else may be neglected or lost. And on the contrary, he who exceedingly hates the same thing considers it misshapen, useless, evil, so much the more as he considers it hurtful to himself, and on this account to be cast away at all costs.

But if this ugly, black iron is moved into the fire, that is, if a sinner begins to turn from his sin and to turn towards God, as the prophet says, 'They had an

[1] Wisd. v. 6. [2] 1 St. John i. 5. [3] ibid., ii. 9, 11.
[4] Wisd. ii. 21.

eye unto him, and were lightened,'[1] forthwith he begins to be enlightened little by little and in that light to see the plain truth of the matter, according to the word of the same prophet, 'In thy light shall we see light.'[2] And then, when the coloured glasses of the passions have been broken and clear ones put in their place, the crystal of pure charity, a man counts eternal things great and temporal things small, indeed, mere nothings, as indeed they are: and he clearly perceives that all created ornament and beauty is in no way comparable to the light of wisdom and truth which is in God and which is God.

And so with Saint Augustine he cries, 'Too late have I loved thee, O thou Beauty of ancient days, yet ever new.'[3] And since Christ saith, 'Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free,'[4] he that is enlightened and set free by the light of truth from hindrance of concupiscence, avarice, ambition, and other passions, rejoices with the prophet and cries, Thou, O Lord, hast broken my bonds in sunder. I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving and will call upon the Name of the Lord.'[5]

CHAPTER 4

Fire makes cold iron to glow: the grace of God makes the words and deeds of a man effectual.

Now fire does not only cause dull iron to glow, but also it changes cold iron into hot, and not only makes it hot, but so burning and glowing that it seems to be fire itself. Great is our Lord and great is his power. See how a man, by nature cold and timid, frightened by anything, not venturing to speak or daring to attempt anything a little difficult, so soon as he is kindled by

[1] Ps. xxxiv. 5. [2] Ps. xxxvi. 9. [3] *Conf.* x, *c.* 27, no. 38.
[4] St. John viii. 32. [5] Ps. cxvi. 14.

the fire of divine charity, he immediately becomes bolder than a lion, the lion that is known to terrify all by its roaring, and to hold every one spellbound, and to whom nothing is difficult, nothing seems hard, and when the fire is strongly burning he says with the Apostle Paul, 'I can do all things through him that strengtheneth me.'[1] But we will discuss that efficacy of fire under different heads: and we will speak shortly first of the efficacy of words and then secondly of the efficacy of deeds.

There are now and there have been in the past, many preachers of the word of God in the Church. What then is the reason, that so few are converted by the exhortations and expostulations of so many men? In truth, in great cities daily during Lent twenty, thirty, or even forty sermons are preached, and yet when Lent is over there appears to be hardly any change in the life of the city: the same vices, the same sins, the same coldness, the same dissoluteness, as before is seen. I find no other cause than this: for the most part the discourses delivered are learned and flowery, but the soul is wanting, the life is wanting, the fire is wanting: in short that great charity is wanting which alone can animate the words of the speakers and kindle and inflame and change the hearts of the hearers. And I say it is not because a persuasive voice and ease of movement is lacking to many preachers: for a machine for attacking a fortress having no ammunition might make a great noise, but would have no effect. What is to be desired is that preachers should be animated by a great love for God and the salvation of souls, and this not feignedly but truly, not strained but as it were springing up naturally from the depth of the heart.

Saint Peter knew nothing of rhetoric; he was skilled only in steering his boat, in casting and mending his

[1] Phil. iv. 13.

nets: but as soon as the Holy Spirit descended upon him in fiery tongues and filled him with burning charity, he began forthwith to speak so powerfully, so eagerly, and so effectually in the midst of the city of Jerusalem, that by one sermon many thousands were converted to penitence and faith;[1] and yet we do not read that in his sermons he used great straining of the voice, or that he tired himself out with excessive action. Saint Bonaventura reports that Saint Francis was unlearned, and that he had not given great attention to rhetoric, and yet when he preached to the people they listened to him as to an angel from heaven: for, saith he, his words were like burning fire, penetrating the inmost heart;[2] and as is told us in the chronicles of the order of Friars Minor, when sometimes after supper he would speak to the people a few extempore words, his hearers were so greatly moved to penitence that the day seemed to be like Good Friday itself. How came so much movement, so great fruit, from a few words? From this, namely, that the holy preacher was as a coal enkindled and his word as a burning torch, as Ecclesiasticus records of Elijah.[3] We have written sermons of Saint Vincent, Saint Bernardine, and of other saints, which some persons would consider scarce worth reading on account of the very great simplicity of the words: and yet we know that many thousands of men were converted to God by those sermons, and that they were always heard with attention by a remarkable number of people, because those simple words came from fiery and glowing hearts.

Lastly, the divine fire shows its power not less by deeds than by words. God decreed to subdue to himself by the Apostle Peter the city of Rome, head of the state and queen of the nations. He decreed also that of the rest of the Apostles, some should be sent to

[1] Acts ii. 14. [2] Bonaventura, *Vita St. Franc.*, *c.* 2.
[3] Ecclus. xlviii. 1.

Ethiopia, some to the Indies, some to Scythia, others to farthest Britain, that by their means the world's idols should be destroyed, the standard of the Cross be raised, laws and customs changed, and the tyranny of Satan be overturned. If any one had foretold these events to the Apostles when they were fishing on the Lake of Gennesareth or when they were seeking a refuge at the time of the Lord's Passion, they would have seemed as dreams or old wives' tales : and yet very soon afterwards all these things came to pass, and by no other force than by that of the burning love which the Holy Spirit kindled in their hearts.

" Love casteth out fear,' [1] and ' Charity endureth all things, hopeth all things.' [2] It thinketh all things possible and with the Apostle cries out, ' I can do all things through him that strengtheneth me.' [3] And so we see, through the work and labour of these men armed with charity alone, idolatry overturned throughout the world, the Church of Christ founded in every place, the trophy of the Cross set up in every kingdom, and this without any army of soldiers and without any machinery of war.

CHAPTER 5

Fire softens hard iron : the grace of God conquers the stubborn heart.

NEXT, fire has also this property, that it softens hard iron so that it can easily be stretched and spread out and turned by the workman into flat blades or figures of any shape. Fire hath great power over iron, but far greater is the power of God when it works upon the stubborn and obstinate hearts of mortal men. Hear Saint Bernard in his book, *De Consideratione* : ' The heart is hard, because it is not alarmed, and because it feels nothing. What, therefore, is a hard heart ?

[1] 1 St. John iv. 18. [2] 1 Cor. xiii. 7. [3] Phil. iv. 13.

It is the heart not wounded with compunction, not softened with piety, not moved with prayers, not yielding to threats stiffened by punishment; it is ungrateful for kindness, regardless of counsel'; and again, 'It is the heart which neither fears God nor reverences man.'[1] And to the truth of all this Pharaoh is witness, for the more plagues were sent upon him by God, the more he was hardened, and the more the mercy of God shone forth in his removal of the plague, so much the more was he moved to despise and contemn God. But when it pleases God to kindle a spark of the true fire of love in a heart, however hard it be, the heart is quickly softened and melts like wax, and no prolonged or hard obstinacy withstands his power: but the heart which has been stony at once becomes of flesh;[2] and when the Spirit of the Lord breathes upon the frozen snows, the waters flow.[3]

We have an example in the Gospel: the woman in the city who was a sinner could not be urged to forsake her sin either by the admonition of her brother, the rebuke of her sister, the honour of her family, nor even her own disgrace, and yet one ray of Christ, penetrating her heart and there kindling a spark of divine love, so suddenly transformed her into another creature that this noble woman did not blush to approach the feet of Christ at a feast in public, and dissolving into tears to make of those tears a bath for the feet of Christ and to wipe them with her own hair instead of with a towel, and in the vehemence of her love to kiss them and anoint them with most precious and sweet-smelling ointment, to signify that she would henceforward dedicate herself and all that was hers to the service of Christ. Therefore she heard that saying of the Lord, 'Her sins which are many are forgiven, for she loved much.'[4]

[1] I, *c.* 2. [2] Ezek. xi. 19. [3] Ps. cxlvii. 18. [4] St. Luke vii. 47.

But we may be allowed to bring forward an example of much later time. William, Duke of Aquitaine, lived in the time of Saint Bernard. He was obdurate and persistent in holding to Anacletus the schismatic Pope and in opposing the lawful Pope. He had banished all the Catholic bishops from his dominions and bound himself by oath never to make peace with them, and because every one knew how hardened in evil was this man's heart and feared his cruelty and pride, no one durst admonish him. It then pleased the Lord to visit the hard heart of this man by his servant Bernard, and to enkindle within his breast a great spark of divine love: suddenly from being a lion he became a lamb, no longer proud but humble, and instead of stubborn, most submissive. At a word from Saint Bernard he embraced the Bishop of Poictiers and with his own hand replaced him in his throne, and, a thing which seems to surpass all wonders, when he had sought from a certain hermit a punishment for his soul on account of the sins he had confessed and was bidden to put upon his bare flesh a brazen breastplate and so to fasten it with a key that no one would be able to loosen it, he obeyed forthwith, and when he was sent by the hermit to the Pope to receive his absolution, he went. But the Pope was doubtful about his penitence and desired to test his patience, and ordered him to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and to seek absolution from the Patriarch of that city ; William at once set out on his journey and fulfilled the Pope's command. And at last this very powerful prince became a humble monk, and there was scarce any one of his age who surpassed him in humility, patience, devotion, and piety. This indeed is 'the change of the right hand of the Most High,'[1] this is the force of the divine fire which no hardness of heart can resist.

[1] Ps. lxxvii. 10.

CHAPTER 6

Fire makes heavy things become light: the grace of God leads souls into the way of righteousness.

THERE remains the last property of fire, that it lessens the weight of heavy objects and lifts them easily aloft.

Why is it that men who are not fervent in divine love are hard of heart, and the prophet says of them, 'How long will ye blaspheme mine honour,[1] and have such pleasure in vanity and seek after leasing?'[2] There is one reason in particular, that 'the body which is corrupt, presseth down the soul,' as Wisdom saith,[3] and 'a heavy yoke is upon the sons of Adam from the day that they go out of their mother's womb till the day that they return to the mother of all things.'[4] And that this yoke is heavy which presses down the soul within the mortal body the same writer explains a little farther on, adding 'Wrath, envy, trouble, and unquietness, fear of death,' and the rest,[5] which are usually called passions of the mind, do so oppress a man that he looks at nothing but the earth to which he clings prostrate, and can neither rise up to seek after God nor can he hasten to run in the way of God's commandments. But when the divine fire from on high begins to be enkindled in the human heart, at once those passions are weakened and put to death, and the heavy pressure begins to be lessened: and if the heat is increased, the human heart is set free without difficulty, it can take wings as of a dove, and can say with the Apostle, 'Our conversation is in heaven.'[6] And when the heart is expanded by the fire, it says with David, 'I will run the way of thy commandments when thou hast set my heart at liberty.'[7]

Indeed since our Saviour said, 'I am come to send

[1] Vulg. *gravi corde*. [2] Ps. iv. 2. [3] Wisd. ix. 15. [4] Ecclus. xl. 1. [5] ibid., xl. 4. [6] Phil. iii. 20. [7] Ps. cxix. 32.

fire on the earth, and what will I, if it be already kindled?'[1] we have seen many persons made so free and light-hearted, that they have parted with all affection for worldly honours and riches, and have said to Christ ascending into heaven, 'Draw us after thee.'[2] Hence we find so many monasteries built, so many deserts begun to be inhabited, so many bands of virgins, to whom it was not only easy to run the way of the commandments, but also to rise up by the way of the Counsels and 'to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.'[3]

O blessed fire, which consumest not, but enlightenest, and if thou dost consume, thou consumest but the harmful vapours, lest they should quench the life. Who will give to me to be seized upon by that fire which, with the light of true wisdom, will purge and take away the darkness of ignorance and the dullness of a false conscience: which will change the cold of indolence, indevotion, and negligence into a burning love which will never suffer my heart to be hardened, but will always soften it with its own heat and make it obedient and devout: which will at last remove the heavy burden of earthly cares and earthly desires and raise my heart on high on the wings of holy contemplation wherewith charity is nourished and increased, that I may say with the prophet, 'Rejoice the soul of thy servant, for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.'[4]

[1] St. Luke xii. 49. [2] Cant. i. 4. [3] Apoc. xiv. 4. [4] Ps. lxxxvi. 4.

SEVENTH STEP

CONSIDERATION OF THE HEAVENS, THAT IS OF THE SUN, MOON, AND STARS

Chapter 1

The sun considered as the dwelling-place of God and most beautiful.

WE will not here labour to raise for ourselves a step towards the consideration of God by means of consideration of the heavens: for we have a leader in the royal prophet who sings in the Psalms, 'The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork.'[1] And since there are two seasons in which we may rise on the wings of contemplation from the heavens to God, namely the day and night, he writes of the former in the same Psalm, 'In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun: which cometh forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a giant to run his course. It goeth forth from the uttermost part of heaven, and runneth about unto the end of it again: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.'[2] Of the latter he writes in another Psalm, 'I will consider thy heavens, even the works of thy fingers: the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained.'[3]

Let us begin with the former season. The Holy Spirit by the mouth of David proclaims four praises of the sun: first that it is the tabernacle of God; second that it is exceeding beautiful; third that it runs

[1] Ps. xix. 1. [2] Ps. xix. 5. [3] Ps. viii. 3.

its course always most swiftly and without becoming weary; fourth that it shows its power chiefly in bestowing light and heat. It is on account of all these properties that Ecclesiasticus hath written, 'A marvellous instrument, the work of the Most High. . . . Great is the Lord that made it.' [1]

First, then, God, the Creator of all things, places his tabernacle in the sun, as being a most noble creature, that is, amongst all corporeal things God chose the sun a royal palace and divine sanctuary, to dwell in. God does indeed 'fill heaven and earth,' [2] and 'the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain him'; [3] yet he is said to dwell more in that place where by working marvels he manifests greater signs of his presence.

But since in the Hebrew text it is said that 'he placed his tabernacle in them,' that is in the heavens, we gather from this place in the Psalm a second excellence of the sun which does not contradict the former. The sun is a great thing, for which God hath prepared a most spacious, beautiful, and noble palace: for he willed that the heaven itself should be the palace of the sun in which it might freely take its course and work, and that the sun itself should be the palace of himself, the most high King. And so just as we learn the greatness and dignity of the sun from the fact that its tabernacle is the heaven, so we learn the greatness and splendour of God from this, that his tabernacle is the sun, doubtless a wonderful instrument, and than which nothing more wonderful is to be found among things created.

Moreover David, when he would point out the remarkable beauty of the sun from things known to us, compared it with a bridegroom going forth out of his chamber: for never do men adorn themselves more, or desire to display their comeliness and their

[1] Ecclus. xliii. 2, 5. [2] Jer. xxiii. 24. [3] 2 Chron. ii. 6.

beauty more, than when they are bridegrooms : for then it is that they desire beyond measure to please the eyes of the bride whom they so ardently love. But if we could steadfastly behold the sun and if we could approach so near to it as to discern its size and beauty, we should not then need the similitude of a bridegroom to understand its incredible magnificence. It is certain that all the beauty of colours depends on light, and that when there is no light the beauty of colours vanishes ; hence nothing is more beautiful than light ; and God himself who is Beauty itself was pleased to be called light. 'God,' says Saint John, is light, and in him is no darkness at all,'[1] and in corporeal things nothing is more lightsome than the sun and therefore there is nothing more beautiful. Add to which, that the beauty of lower things, and particularly the beauty of man, soon fades, while the beauty of the sun is never destroyed, is never lessened, and continually makes all things glad with its unchanging splendour. Do we not perceive, how at sunrise everything as it were rejoices ? Not alone are men made joyful, but winds blow sweetly, flowers open, grass springs up, birds make the air sweet with their song. Hence that aged blind man Tobit when the angel said to him, 'Joy be ever with thee,' answered, 'What joy shall I have, who sit in darkness and see not the light of heaven ?'[2]

Then, my soul, come, think with thyself : if the created sun at his rising doth so rejoice all things, what will the uncreated Sun do, who is beyond comparison more beautiful and bright, when to the pure of heart he shall arise to be seen and contemplated not for a short season but for ever ? And how sad and unhappy will that hour be to the wicked when they shall be sent away to everlasting darkness, where the rays of neither created nor uncreated sun will ever

[1] 1 St. John i. 5. [2] Tobit v. 11, Vulg.

penetrate! And what will be the greatness of the joy of that soul to whom the Father of lights will say, 'Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'[1]

CHAPTER 2

From the course of the sun we perceive the greatness of God.

AFTER this the same prophet celebrates the most wonderful course of the sun: 'It rejoiceth,' saith he, 'as a giant to run his course.'[2] A mighty giant surely, if he steps out according to the size of his body and runs swiftly according to his strength, covers an immense distance in a short space of time. And as the prophet, in order to explain in such fashion as he was able, the beauty of the sun, had compared it to a bridegroom, so he afterwards compared it to a giant, in order that, using the same resemblance, he might explain in such manner as was possible the swiftness of its course.

But if he had not compared it with a man, however great and strong he may be, but to flying birds, arrows, winds, lightning, we should yet be very far from arriving at the truth: for if that be true which we perceive with our eyes, namely that the sun runs in four-and-twenty hours through the whole compass of its orbit, and if the compass of the sun's orbit surpasses almost by an infinite degree the course of the earth, and if the orbit of the earth includes about twenty thousand miles, which is absolutely true—then without doubt it must follow that each hour the sun runneth many thousands of miles: and if I say every hour, I may say it also of every quarter of an hour, or of almost every minute.

If any one will take notice of the sunrise or sunset, particularly in a clear horizon, such as one finds at sea or in a plain, he will perceive that the whole body of

[1] St. Jas. i. 17; St. Matt. xxv. 21. [2] Ps. xix. 5.

the sun rises above the horizon in a short space of time, as it were in less than the eighth part of an hour: and yet the diameter of the sun is much greater than the diameter of the earth, which notwithstanding contains seven thousand miles.

I myself was once desirous of learning what space of time the sun would take in setting. At the beginning of its setting I began to read the Psalm *Miserere mei Deus*: and I had scarce read it twice through when the whole sun had set.

And so in the short space of time during which the Psalm *Miserere* can be twice read, the sun must traverse in his course a distance much greater than seven thousand miles. Who would believe this, unless reasoning certainly proved it? And if we add, that the body which moves so quickly is a mass greater than the whole earth, and accomplishes this swift movement without break or fatigue, and, should God command, could continue thus for ever: certainly every one but he who is stupid or a dunce must admire the infinite power of the Creator.

Truly therefore writes the Wise Man, 'This is a marvellous instrument, the work of the Most High,' and truly, 'Great is the Lord that made it.'

CHAPTER 3

The sun gives light and heat; God gives true wisdom and charity.

THERE remains the property of light and heat, of which David says, 'There is nothing hid from the heat thereof.'[1] This one luminous body placed in the midst of the universe gives light to all the stars, to the whole atmosphere, to all the sea and the whole land, and with its life-giving heat makes all the plants of the earth, all

[1] Ps. xix. 6.

the seeds and trees, live and blossom, to bring fruit to perfection, and puts forth its power even beneath the earth, producing all kinds of metals.

Wherefore Saint James in the beginning of his Epistle compares God himself with the sun: 'Every good gift and every perfect giving cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.' [1] As the sun is the parent of corporeal lights, God is the Father of spiritual lights, but in three respects there is great unlikeness between God and the sun. For first, the sun, as it fills the whole earth with its light and heat, has need of constant change, but God, being whole in all places, needs no change: and therefore Saint James saith, 'with whom is no variableness.' In the second place the sun, because it is always changing its place, makes, by turns, day for some and night for others, shines upon some and shadows others: but God never moves and is always present to all: and so Saint James adds, 'with whom is no shadow of turning.' And lastly, what is greatest of all, all gifts and benefits which come from the earth are produced by the sun as the father of corporeal lights. These are indeed good, but they are not the best, nor are they perfect: indeed they are limited, temporal, failing, and do not make a man good: and those who will may use them amiss, and many men use them to their hurt: but from the Father of spiritual lights all the most excellent and perfect gifts descend, making him who possesses them very good and perfect, and no man can misuse them: but they lead him who perseveres to the state of true happiness which is the sum of all good things.

Wherefore, my soul, inquire what are those best and perfect gifts which come down from above from the Father of lights, and when thou hast found them,

[1] St. Jas. i. 17.

eager for them and with all thy strength strive to obtain them.

But there is no need to seek far, for the sun itself will show them sufficiently. The sun accomplishes all by light and heat, and these, namely light and heat, are gifts bestowed by the Father of corporeal lights: so also the best gifts and perfect givings which are from above and descend from God, the true Father of lights, are the light of wisdom and the disposing of charity.

The light of wisdom, which makes a man truly wise and which no one can misuse, and which leads one to the fountain of wisdom in the heavenly country, is that which teaches a man to despise temporal things and to esteem heavenly things ; it teaches a man 'not to trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God';[1] it teaches him not to make this place of exile into his fatherland, and not to love this pilgrimage, but rather to endure it : and lastly it teaches him to pass this present life in patience, since it is full of dangers and temptations, and that death is to be an object of desire, for 'blessed are the dead that die in the Lord.'[2]

The ordering of true charity, what is it, but to love God without limit and without measure, who is the end of all desires: and other things which are but means to an end, to love with measure and only to such a degree as is necessary to the end, that is to the attainment of blessedness.

For certainly there is not one among the children of men who in respect of the care of his body will so overturn this order as to love health moderately and a bitter draught immoderately, when he knows that the one is the end and the other but the means. How does it happen that many who desire to be considered wise persons, keep no measure in heaping up riches, in seeking after carnal pleasures and in pursuing honours, as if in these good things consisted the end of the

[1] 1 Tim. vi. 17. [2] Apoc. xiv. 13.

heart's desire: but in loving God and in seeking eternal happiness they are satisfied with so little as if it were the means to an end and not the end of all other things? The reason is this, that they have the wisdom of this world and not the wisdom that is from above which cometh down from the Father of lights, and because they have not ordered charity and so have not true charity, which cannot but be ordered; for they are filled with covetousness, which is not of the Father but of the world. Thou therefore, my soul, while thou art wandering as a pilgrim away from thy native land and amongst enemies, who make a pretence of true wisdom and true charity, and for wisdom offer craftiness and for charity, covetousness: pour forth thy groans with all thy heart before the Father of lights, that he will cause the best and perfect gifts, namely the light of wisdom and the ardour of ordered charity, to descend into thy heart: that, filled therewith, thou mayst with sure foot run the way of God's commandments and reach that native land where thou wilt drink of the very fountain of wisdom and live by the pure milk of charity.

CHAPTER 4

The moon is subject to the sun: the soul united with God is truly enlightened.

I COME now to the night, in which the heaven by means of moon and stars maketh a step to ascend unto God, for thus saith David, 'I will consider the heavens, even the works of thy fingers: the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained.'[1]

If we were able to see the heaven itself, the prophet would not have said, as though explaining what had gone before, 'the moon and the stars which thou hast

[1] Ps. viii. 3.

ordained ': and indeed if our senses could reach out to heaven itself or if we could search out its nature and properties by certain reasoning, doubtless there we should have an excellent ladder by which to find God.

We know that there were some who by the movement of the stars defined the nature of the sky as a fifth element, simple, incorruptible, and continually moving in a circle : and we know that there have been others also who would have heaven to be the element of fire, which does not move circularly and which is in some parts incorruptible.

We do not seek opinions, but certain knowledge or teaching of faith, that of this we may build a firm ladder towards the knowledge of God. Therefore we will content ourselves with raising a ladder as the prophet does, of the moon and stars which we see, as a short while ago we made a step of the sun, which is the light and the chief light of all the luminaries.

The moon has two properties which may help us to ascend and to reach to God. First, the nearer it approaches the sun, so much the more does it shine in the upper part next to the sky and the darker it is in the lower part next to earth, and when it is altogether beneath the sun and entirely joined with it, then is it wholly light toward heaven and dark toward earth. Again, when it is opposite the sun, to those who dwell on the earth the whole appears to be shining, and the upper part towards heaven hath no light.

This property of the moon may teach men to understand how careful they ought to be of their nearness to, and subjection to, and union with God, the true Father of lights. The moon signifies man, the sun signifies God. When the moon is opposite the sun, then with light borrowed from the sun it looks upon the earth alone, and as it were turns its back to the sky: whence it appears then most beautiful to those

who dwell on the earth, but to the dwellers in heaven it appears misshapen.

Thus mortal men, when like the prodigal son they have gone away from their father and departed to a far country, abusing the light of reason which they received from the Father of lights, looking only upon the earth and forgetting God, think only of earth, love only the earth, and are wholly occupied in amassing its good things: by the children of this world they are considered wise and happy, but by those who dwell in heaven are judged poor and naked and blind and crippled and wretched and miserable.[1]

But, on the contrary, the moon in conjunction with the sun is completely subjected to it, and the whole shines from the upper part and looks at heaven only, while it turns as it were its back to the earth and vanishes from the eyes of men.

Thus when a wicked man begins to turn to piety and by a perfect conversion is by humility made subject to God the true sun of souls, and united to him by charity, then he fulfils the admonition of the Apostle, that he should seek the things that are above, where Christ is at the right hand of God, and set the mind on things above, not on things on the earth;[2] and then by fools he is despised and reckoned as dead. For truly such a man is dead to the world and his life is hid with Christ in God: but when Christ, who is his life, shall appear, then will he also appear with him in glory, as the same Apostle adds in the same place.

And this is the reason (as Saint Augustine notes in his epistle to Januarius) why the Lord's Passover, both under the old and under the new law, cannot be rightly kept except after the full moon, that is when the moon, which at the full is opposite, begins, by turning, to return towards conjunction with the sun: for by this heavenly sign God willed to show that it was by

[1] Apoc. iii. 17. [2] Col. iii. 1, 2.

the Passion and Resurrection of the Lord that man, by reason of his sin opposed to God, began to return to him and by the merits of Jesus Christ attained to his favour and to union with him.

But, my soul, if by the inspiration of the grace of God thou findest thyself, perchance, subject by a true humility to the Father of lights and happily made one with him by ardent charity, do not imitate those foolish persons who change like the moon, but strive to be like the wise who remain as the sun, as the Wise Man testifies, 'A fool changeth as the moon.' [1]

For while the moon quickly approaches conjunction, it just as quickly turns back again: but if thou wilt be wise, do not waste the grace once received, do not depart, do not retire, for in no place wilt thou find anything better, and thou dost not know if a return will be granted thee, if thou departest of thine own accord: for he who promised pardon to the penitent and grace to those who return, hath not promised thee a long life nor the gift of penitence. Therefore be safe and turn thy back to the earth and gaze upon thy sun, rest in him and delight thyself in him, abide in him: say with the Apostle Peter, 'It is good for us to be here'; [2] and with the martyr Ignatius, 'It is better for me to die for the sake of Jesus Christ than to reign over the boundaries of the earth.' [3] And likewise let it be with thee, that those who savour of the earth judge concerning thee, 'For he is not approved whom the world commendeth, but whom God commendeth.' [4]

CHAPTER 5

The moon illumining the night and sometimes leaving it in darkness symbolizes divine grace.

THERE is another property of the moon, which God also makes to serve his chosen. The moon rules the

[1] Ecclus. xxvii. 11. [2] St. Matt. xvii. 4. [3] *Ep. ad Rom.* 6. [4] 2 Cor. x. 18.

night as the sun rules the day, as says Moses [1] and David in the Psalms; [2] but the sun rules the whole day with continuous splendour, while the moon enlightens the night now with much light, now with a little, and sometimes the darkness of night is not relieved by any light at all. So God, as Sun, enlightens with eternal brightness the holy angels and the souls of the blessed, with whom is perpetual day: 'And there shall be no night there,' says Saint John,[3] but the night of this our pilgrimage and exile in which we walk 'by faith and not by sight'; [4] and where we are guided by the Holy Scriptures as a 'light shining in a dark place,' as Saint Peter speaks in his second Epistle,[5] is visited by God, who illumines our hearts and by turns sometimes leaves them in the darkness of desolation. And, my soul, thou shouldst not be overmuch saddened, if thou enjoy no light of consolation, nor shouldst thou be too greatly exhilarated if after a short space thou breathest once more in the light and consolation of devotion. For God shows himself in the night of this world not as a sun, but as a moon, and to us puny and insignificant creatures he appears now as the full moon with a light of consolation and now as bereft of all light he leaves us in the horror and thick darkness of night: for as Paul the Apostle, the chosen vessel, and who when caught up to the third heaven heard 'unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter,' [6] at one time said, 'I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation'; [7] and at another time when mourning and lamenting said, 'But I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'; [8] and

[1] Gen. i. 16. [2] Ps. cxxxvi. 8, 9. [3] Apoc. xxi. 25. [4] 2 Cor. v. 7.
[5] 2 St. Pet. i. 19. [6] 2 Cor. xii. 2. [7] ibid., vii. 4. [8] Rom. vii. 23.

in the second Epistle to the Corinthians he writes, 'For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life.'[1] And it is this which Saint John Chrysostom teaches,[2] that God works thus in all his saints, that he never allows them to have either tribulations or consolations uninterrupted: but both by adversity and by prosperity he as it were weaves the life of the righteous. Thus far concerning the moon.

CHAPTER 6

The order and concord of the stars presents a picture of the heavenly hierarchy.

OF the ornaments of the sky there remain the stars, concerning which the Wise Man says, 'The beauty of heaven, the glory of the stars,' but he adds at once, 'giving light in the highest places of the Lord.'[3] For whatever is the splendour of the stars, as also that of the sun and the moon, is entirely an illumination from the Father, and it is not the sun which enlightens the world by day nor is it the moon or the stars that enlighten the world by night, but it is the Lord who dwelleth on high, who illumines the world by means of the sun and moon and stars. For it is he himself who, as the prophet Baruch says, 'sendeth forth light and it goeth, calleth it again and it obeyeth him with fear. The stars shined in their watches and rejoiced: when he calleth them, they say, Here we be; and so with cheerfulness they showed light unto him that made them.'[4] In these words there is signified the infinite power of God, which with incredible ease in one moment produces bodies so immense and magnificent,

[1] 2 Cor. i. 8. [2] *Hom.* viii in St. Matt. [3] Ecclus. xliii. 9.
[4] Baruch iii. 33.

and adorns them and causes them to work. Our expression 'to call' is, with God, 'to create': 'God calleth those things which be not as though they were,'[1] and by his call he maketh them to be what they are: and for the stars to say 'Here we be,' is nothing else than continually to exist and to work according to the voice of their ruler; and 'to show light with cheerfulness unto him that made them,' is promptly and eagerly to obey their Maker and in obedience to fulfil their task with great pleasure and joy.

But an exceeding wonderful thing in regard to the stars is this, that though they move very swiftly and never pause in that most rapid course, some moving slowly and others quickly in their orbits, yet they always so maintain their distance and proportion in regard to others, that there arises thence a melodious and most sweet harmony. Concerning this symphony God saith, in the book of Job,[2] 'Who can tell the method of the heavens, and who can still the symphony of the skies?' This is not a symphony of voices or of sounds which is perceived by the bodily ear, but the harmony of proportion in the movements of the stars, which is felt by the ear of the heart. If indeed all the stars of the firmament traverse the whole circuit of the sky with the same speed once in twenty-four hours, yet the seven stars which are called planets or wandering stars are spurred on in different motions, some swifter, some slower, so that the stars of the firmament may be said to imitate the bass notes (to use ordinary expressions) and the planets make a constant and charming counterpoint.

But these matters are beyond us, and only those who dwell in heaven understand the order of those movements and hear that harmony. And since the stars, keeping their order and always turning in the orbit, are not wearied, they seem to resemble noble virgins,

[1] Rom. iv. 17. [2] Job xxxviii. 37, Vulg.

skilled in the dance, continually performing most delightful movements.

But, my soul, rise thou a little higher, if thou canst, and as thou observest the great splendour of the sun, the beauty of the moon, the number and variety of other luminaries, the wonderful harmony of the heavens and the delightful movements of the stars, consider: what it will be to see God above the heavens, as it were a sun, 'dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto';[1] to gaze upon that Virgin, the Queen of heaven, who, 'fair as the moon,'[2] maketh joyful the whole city of God; to look upon the bands and ranks of many thousands of angels, who more in number than the stars and brighter than they, adorn the heaven of heavens; to perceive the souls of holy men, amongst the choirs of angels, as planets mingled with the stars of the firmament; and what it will be to hear the songs of praise and that endless Alleluia burst forth most sweetly from united voices in the streets of that city.

Thus it will come to pass that the beauty of the heavens will not appear so very great, and the things that are beneath the sky will seem altogether insignificant, indeed almost nothing, and to be considered despicable and worthy of contempt.

[1] 1 Tim. vi. 16. [2] Cant. vi. 10.

EIGHTH STEP

CONSIDERATION OF THE RATIONAL SOUL

Chapter I

The Soul is a created spirit: God uncreated Spirit and the Creator of all things.

UP to this point we have gone through all created things, striving with reflection of our mind to rise from created things to the Creator.

Now we find human souls higher in dignity than all bodies, and we know that they belong to the lowest order of spiritual beings, between whom and God we find no intermediate being, save the hierarchies and ranks of angels.

The human soul possesses such a likeness to God its Creator, that I hardly know whether by any other way a man could ascend to God more easily than by consideration of his own soul.

Thus it is that God wills man to be without excuse if he has no knowledge of God, since by the help of God he may easily draw it from the knowledge he possesses of his own soul.[1]

First, therefore, man's soul is a spirit, for thus the holy Fathers explain those words in Genesis, 'The Lord formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life';[2] and the word of Tobit, 'Command my spirit to be taken from me';[3] and that of the Wise Man, 'Then shall the

[1] Rom. i. 20. [2] Gen. ii. 7. [3] Tobit iii. 6.

dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return to God who gave it.' [1]

Although this word spirit means also wind, of which it is said in the Psalms, 'Wind and storm fulfilling his word,' [2] and in the Gospel, 'The wind bloweth where it listeth and thou hearest the sound thereof': [3] yet there is no doubt that the wind is a very delicate body which on account of its extreme rarity resembles more the spiritual nature than any other body.

The human soul is properly spirit, not body, and it is not produced from any substance, but is created by God, a truth concerning which there is no dispute among Catholics. Here, therefore, begins the excellence of the soul and its likeness to God: for God is Spirit, as the Saviour plainly declares, 'God is Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and truth.' [4] But although God is a Spirit and the human soul is a spirit, yet God is a Spirit uncreated and the Creator, and the soul is a created spirit: from this it follows that there is an infinite distance between the spirit which is the human soul and the Spirit which is God. Wherefore greatly may the soul rejoice in being spiritual in the nature of its being, and therefore by the nobility of its nature superior to the heavens and the stars, and also how deeply ought it to humble itself and submit to God its Creator, since from nothing it was made, and is of itself nothing!

CHAPTER 2

The soul is immortal: God is eternal.

NEXT, the human soul, because it is simple spirit, is also immortal: for it possesses naught in itself whence it can be divided or be made to perish.

[1] Eccles. xii. 7. [2] Ps. cxlviii. 8. [3] St. John iii. 8.
[4] ibid., iv. 24.

But in this matter also, in the degree in which it is able to boast in its superiority over the souls of brute animals which perish along with their bodies, to that degree also it ought to understand the nobility of its Creator and to marvel at it, for he is not only immortal, but also eternal. For there was a time when the human soul did not exist, and it came into being by the will of God alone, and by the will of the same God it can be reduced to nothing, although in itself it has no element of corruption. And so rightly the Apostle spake concerning God, 'Who only hath immortality':[1] for it is he alone who can be dissolved by no force, no change, no reasoning, since he is in himself Being, Life itself, and the Fountain of being and of life.

CHAPTER 3

The human soul is endowed with reason: God is Light and Intelligence.

THIRDLY, the human soul is endowed with intelligence: for it recognizes not only colours, flavours, scents, sounds, heat, cold, hardness, softness, and other things of that kind which are evident to the bodily senses; but it also discriminates substances, and not only separately but altogether; and not only does it know present events, but conjectures the future, and by discoursing transcends the heavens, pierces the depths, from causes searches out effects and from effects turns back again to the cause; and lastly, with the apex of his mind a man touches God himself, 'Who dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto';[2] and this is the light concerning which Saint John saith in his Gospel, 'That was the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world,'[3] and David in the Psalms, 'Lord, lift thou up the light

[1] 1 Tim. vi. 16. [2] ibid. [3] St. John i. 9.

of thy countenance upon us,'[1] and 'Be ye not like unto horse and mule which have no understanding.'[2]

Great is the dignity of the soul, by possessing which a man is like unto God and unlike the beasts: and hence man can and should conjecture how great is the eminence and sublimity of God, his Creator.

The soul is endowed with the light of understanding, but God is Light and Understanding.

The soul passes from cause to effect and from effect to cause, and in the discourse it pursues knowledge, but with considerable labour; God by a single and simple intuition knows all things perfectly.

The soul understands the things which exist and thus its knowledge depends on things; God by understanding makes things to be as they are, and thus the existence of things depends on the knowledge of God.

The soul conjectures concerning the future; God always beholds all future things not less clearly than the past and the present.

The soul is in need of many things that it may exercise the gift of intelligence, e.g. an object, species, an image or other things; God is in need of nothing, for he himself is his own Essence, and it is all things to him: so also his own Essence is his understanding.

Lastly, the soul, so long as it is in the body, not only does not see God, but sees not the angels, nor does it even see itself or any corporeal substance properly; and it makes mistakes in many things, is ignorant of much, has an opinion about many things, but true knowledge of very few: whereas God is ignorant of nothing, surmises nothing, never is mistaken, never errs, 'All things are naked and opened unto his eyes,' as the Apostle says in the Epistle to the Hebrews.[3]

Therefore if a man makes so much of his knowledge,

[1] Ps. iv. 7. [2] Ps. xxxii. 10. [3] Heb. iv. 13.

as the Apostle says, 'Knowledge puffeth up,'[1] how greatly should the Creator's knowledge be admired, compared with which all our knowledge is not knowledge but ignorance!

CHAPTER 4

The soul has practical knowledge: in the Mind of God is the supreme law of righteousness and justice.

FOURTHLY, there flourishes in the human soul another kind of knowledge, which consists, not in speculation, but in action.

Why are there so many books of philosophers concerning vices and virtues, so many laws of princes and counsels of lawyers, so many institutions and exercises setting forth the art of living well? In these there is wonderfully perceived the light of human reason, by which we are separated a very long distance from the beasts. But all these things are nothing to the eternal law which exists in the mind of the Creator, from which as from a most fertile source proceed all laws and all commandments: 'There is one lawgiver, God,' says Saint James in his Epistle.[2] He himself is truth and righteousness and wisdom, by whom 'kings reign and princes decree justice.'[3] Hence thou wilt never discover the art of living well and happily until, entered into the school of Christ who is the true and only master,[4] thou hast learnt, by his word and example, that righteousness which exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees[5] and, I may even add, of the philosophers, and the end of which is 'Charity out of a pure heart and of a good conscience and of faith unfeigned.'[6]

[1] 1 Cor. viii. 1. [2] St. Jas. iv. 12. [3] Prov. viii. 15.
[4] St. Matt. xxiii. 8. [5] ibid., v. 20. [6] 1 Tim. i. 5.

CHAPTER 5

The soul of man is an inventor of arts. God is the Fountain of genius and of the wisdom which invents things.

FIFTHLY, the soul of man possesses a third kind of knowledge, which consists in cleverly fashioning things. Indeed, spiders know how to weave their nets, and birds know how to build nests, and bees know how to make honey, foxes how to seek out holes for houses; but these animals by a kind of natural instinct accomplish one and the same thing in the same manner. But the human soul, endowed with reason of judgement, discovers numberless arts by which it rules and dominates all animals, whether they will or no : so that birds find their wings of no assistance, fishes are not helped by deep water, lions and bears by their remarkable strength, nor horses and mules by their fierceness, nor stags and goats by their harmfulness. Indeed, even boys take birds with snares and lime and nets, and fishermen catch fish with hook and nets. Men with skill and art shut up lions and bears in iron cages and lead them about, inclose bulls and stags with ropes or stab them with a spear, tame horses and mules with a bit and have learnt to subdue them to their control.

What shall I say of the art of navigation ? What a great light of genius in the human soul is shown forth when great ships laden with heavy weights pass over the sea, not only by means of oars, as though on foot, but even by sails, as though they had learnt to fly with wings.

What shall I say of agriculture ? Who is not astounded at the intelligence of man, when he examines the cornfields, vineyards, orchards, gardens, wells, various streams of water led for watering the gardens and moistening the fields ?

What of architecture ? Who does not wonder at

the palaces, temples, cities, citadels, towers, amphitheatres, pyramids, obelisks ?

I leave aside the arts of painting and sculpture by which the faces of men, and other things yet living, are so depicted with paint in pictures, or sculptured in marble that one would believe them real, not painted or carved.

I leave aside other arts of human genius, which are either necessities of life or which minister to convenience or pleasure; they are so numerous as scarcely to be counted.

Therefore, my soul, give thanks to God who hath willed to separate by so great a distance thy nature from the nature of animals : and at the same moment lift the eyes of thy mind to thy Creator himself, in whom is the fount of intellect and of the wisdom that accomplishes all these things. From that fountain flowed whatever degree of intelligence hath come to thy nature: and if thou marvellest at the genius of man which has taught him by industry and skill to control those animals which lack reason, admire still more thy God, whom all things serve and obey, and not only animate creatures but inanimate. And if it seem to thee a great matter that a man should discover so many methods of navigating the seas, of cultivating fields, building houses, why doth it not appear to thee a far greater thing that God in his wisdom hath made heaven and earth, the seas and all things that are therein, and controlleth and ruleth all ?

And if, lastly, thou art amazed at the art of painting pictures as though living countenances were drawn from marble, why art thou not amazed at the skill of thy Creator, who formed a real and living man from dust and from his rib formed a real and living woman, especially if thou add that what men do cannot be done without the help of God, and what God doth is done by himself alone, with aid from no other being ?

CHAPTER 6

The free judgement of man is compared with the freedom of God.

IN the sixth place, the soul of man is endowed with a free judgement of the will, which is common to him with God himself and with the angels, and which separates him from other created beings. Great is this nobility and a wonderful excellence.

But in God, the Creator of all things, liberty exceeds it so greatly that the freedom of the soul, when compared with it, seems scarcely to be its shadow.

First, the liberty of the human will is weak, and easily prone to choose for itself evil and harmful things: the freedom of the divine will is very strong and can in no way fail or be inclined to evil. For as to be subject to death is a proof of the weakness of the mortal body, to be unable to die is a proof of the strength of the glorified body: so also to be able to sin is a weakness of the free judgement, not to be able to sin will be the health of the judgement when in the heavenly country God will bestow upon us by grace that which he himself for ever possesses by nature.

Hence our free judgement is indeed free, for it is able to will and not to will, or even to will and to refuse: but it is not able to accomplish what it wills, or to cause that what it does not will should not take place, even as regards itself, and how much more in regard to others. Hear the Apostle lamenting in his letter to the Romans, 'For the good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do.'[1] And who of us has not experienced this? I will to pray to God with attention, and I bid my imagination not to wander while I am giving myself to prayer, and not to draw me away to think of other things and I cannot hold it to its duty: and when I am less careful about this

[1] Rom. vii. 19.

matter I find myself deluded by imagination, prayer is interrupted and I have slipped off to the consideration of other things. I have a will not to desire evil things and not to be angered beyond reason, and by a free judgement I command the irascible and concupiscible faculties which are within me, and which ought to be subdued to reasonable law, I command them to submit entirely to the rule of reason and not to allow themselves to be led away in any manner by the bodily senses: and often they do not obey, and they do not what I desire, but what I do not will. But what is far more astonishing and wretched is that the mind commands the body and is obeyed immediately, the mind commands itself and is resisted. 'Whence this monstrousness?' saith Saint Augustine. 'The mind commands the hand to be moved: and such readiness is there, that command is scarce distinct from obedience: yet the mind is mind, and the hand is body. The mind commands the mind, its own self, to will, and yet it doth not. . . . But it willeth not entirely, therefore doth it not command entirely. It is therefore no monstrousness, but a disease of the mind, that it doth not wholly rise, by truth up-borne, borne down by custom.' [1]

But the freedom of will of the Lord God is so joined with absolute power that it is written concerning it, 'He hath done whatsoever pleased him,' [2] and 'There is none that can resist thy will.' [3]

Wherefore, my soul, if thou art wise, boast not concerning the power of a judgement free from control, until thou comest to 'the glorious liberty of the children of God,' [4] when the heavenly Physician shall have healed all thy weakness, and shall have fulfilled thy desires for good things. In the meanwhile earnestly bemoan thyself and say to God with the prophet,

[1] Aug. *Conf.* viii, *c.* 9, no. 21, trans. Dr. Pusey. [2] Ps. cxv. 3.
[3] Esther xiii. 9. [4] Rom. viii. 21.

'Thou hast been my succour, leave me not';[1] and say thoughtfully from thy whole heart, and not with thy body or from custom only, those words which thou repeatest more than seven times a day, 'O God, make speed to save me; O Lord, make haste to help me.'[2]

CHAPTER 7

The will of the rational soul can seek after spiritual good things: God is himself the highest good, that is Love.

SEVENTH: the soul of man hath a reasoning will, which not only is able to seek after present, particular, and corporeal goods, such as even animals desire; but also good things afar off, general and spiritual, which are made known by faith and reason, and so also that very highest and infinite good which is God.

And this it is which makes a man capable of great virtues, and especially of the queen of all virtues, namely Love.

Brute animals love, but with a love of concupiscence; they are altogether ignorant of the love of friendship. But thou, O soul, God has made capable of that very gift which is the fount of all gifts, and which so unites thee with himself, the highest good, that he abides in thee and thou in him, as it were a most beautiful charity. 'God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.'[3]

But if the good of the created will is so great, how great will be that good in which is the perfect uncreated will!

Only the will of God is capable of infinite love, by which the infinite goodness of God is worthy to be loved. And that will is not lacking in virtues, nor has it need of being directed by the intellect: for it and intellect are one and the same thing, as wisdom and love are one thing in God.

[1] Ps. xxvii. 11. [2] Ps. lxx. 1. [3] 1 St. John iv. 16.

CHAPTER 8

The presence of the soul in the body is a picture of the existence of God in created things.

EIGHTH: the human soul is in the human body, but in a way very different from that in which the souls of beasts are within their bodies.

The souls of brutes are material, and extend to the extent of the body, so that part is in a part, and the whole in the whole. But the human soul which is indivisible spirit, is in a wonderful way wholly in the whole and also whole in each part: and when it fills the whole body it nevertheless occupies no place in the body: and when the body grows, the soul does not grow, but that which before was not, now begins to be: and if a limb is cut off or burnt, the soul is not on that account lessened or dried up, but in that limb, where it was before, it ceases to exist, and without any bruise or mutilation of itself.

This is a true picture of the existence of God in created things. For God is indivisible Spirit: and although he fills the whole world and all its parts, he does not occupy any space, and he is wholly in the whole world and wholly in any part of it: and when a new creature is produced, God begins to exist in it, and yet he is not moved: and when any creature is perchance destroyed or dies, God is not destroyed, nor does he die, but he ceases to be in that creature, and does not change his place.

God surpasses the soul by a long way. If the soul is in the body and controls and moves it, it has of necessity to take the form of the body, and to be united with it so that of soul and body one man should be made. God does not need that a form should be produced, nor that the world should have a soul, nor that of himself and the world one substance should be produced: but from his own immensity, he has this, that

wherever he is, because of his indivisible unity, he is wholly everywhere, and that because of his omnipotence he should rule all things, bear all things, move all things.

Next, the soul, although it may be said to exist in the whole body, yet it does not belong to it, except in the living and animate parts; hence it is not in the humours, in the hair, nails, or in limbs which are withered or dead: but God is absolutely in all things, not only in corporeal, but also in spiritual, and it is not possible that anything should exist in which God is not. Besides, the soul does not exist except in its own body, and in that narrow and confined space all the parts are gathered together: for if any part is separated from the others, in that part the soul cannot exist.

But God is wholly in this whole, although the whole is exceeding great, and its parts, though very close, not united together, and if another world were formed and yet another, God would be in them all. For thus it is written, 'Heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee.'[1] And if other heavens and other earths should be formed, in them also he would be: and if new heavens and new earths were multiplied without end he would fill all things, and where he was not there would be altogether nothing.

CHAPTER 9

The soul is a kind of image of the Most Holy Trinity.

NINTH: besides what has been said, the soul of man possesses in itself an image, though obscure, of the divine Trinity: since it has a fertile memory, strength of intellect, power of loving, and the mind also by its intelligence forms its own word, and from the mind

[1] 2 Chron. vi. 18.

and the word, love issues: because that which is understood by the mind and represented by the word, as good, is continually loved and desired.

But by a far higher and diviner mode God the Father begets God the Word, and the Father and the Word breathe forth God the Holy Spirit, who is living Love and the living Fount of all pure love. And for this reason the mystery of the Trinity surpasses natural means of knowledge, and it is not possible to attain to understanding it without supernatural light, however learned a philosopher may be.

And the soul of man produces the word and love, which are not substances but accidents, and therefore are not persons: but God the Father begets the Word of one substance with himself and the Father and the Word breathe forth the Holy Spirit, of like Substance with them both, whence the three Persons are rightly called Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Next, the soul of man produces a word which does not last long, and the will produces love which has no long continuance ; but God the Father begets the eternal Word and the Father and the Son breathe forth the eternal Holy Spirit, for God without the Word and without his Spirit cannot exist.

Lastly, the soul of man by one word represents one thing, and so he multiplies words, not only of the mind, but of the lips, and the human will is forced to produce many acts of love if it desire to love many objects: but God speaks all truth by one single Word, and loves all good things by one act of love.

CHAPTER 10

The soul contributes natural gifts to the body : God bestows heavenly gifts on the soul.

LASTLY, the human soul has this quality, that while it is in the body, although unseen and unheard, though it

does not move and is scarce known to exist in the body, and though when it is withdrawn nothing appears to be wanting to the body, yet it bestows all good things upon the body—sense, movement, speech, substance, beauty, strength.

For why does a man live, see, hear, speak, walk, subsist; why is he strong, handsome, lovable, unless there is a soul within him? And why is it that after death he neither sees, hears, speaks, nor moves but lies misshapen, useless, and unseen, unless the soul have departed, whence all those good things are derived?

Thus, O soul, thy God, while he lives in thee by his grace, himself causes thee to see what faith shows thee: causeth thee to hear what the Lord speaketh within thee, to walk by the way of his commandments to the heavenly Jerusalem: to speak in prayer unto God and to thy neighbour in holy exhortation: to live by persevering in good works and to be strong in battle against invisible enemies, and glorious in the eyes of the invisible God and of his angels.

But beware, lest the grace of God be withdrawn, for it is the life of thy soul, and if it be withdrawn thou wilt experience loss which will bring with it the first death: whence thou mayst be snatched away to the second death, from which no resurrection is vouchsafed.[1]

O if the Lord would open thine eyes and thou couldst gaze upon the glorious form and exceeding splendour bestowed upon the soul that is pleasing to God and is united to him by true charity: and if thou couldst see with what eyes God beholdeth her when he prepares a place for her, what joys he promises, and with how great a longing she is awaited by the angels and other blessed spirits: thou certainly wouldst not be able to suffer such beauty to be defiled by any, even a slight, stain: and if perchance that should

[1] Apoc. xx. 5, 6, 14.

happen, thou wouldst forthwith strive to wipe away those spots, even the smallest, in rivers of tears.

To this indeed Saint Bonaventura refers when he says concerning Saint Francis, 'Since he saw that it was not possible to follow the Lamb without spot, without contracting any stain, he took the greatest care to purge his soul daily with copious showers of tears and to wipe away all stains, however slight they might be.'[1]

But if by the same grace of God thine inward eyes are opened and thou canst see how great is the foulness of a sinful soul, what a fetid odour it breathes, as a putrid corpse, and how God and the holy angels refuse to look upon it, although perchance it dwells within a beautiful body and is in the eyes of men adorned and lovely: then without any doubt thou wilt be so horrified that for no cause whatever wilt thou suffer thyself to become such, or to abide any longer in that condition.

[1] Bonavent., *Vita St. Franc.*, *c.* 5, no. 7.

NINTH STEP

CONSIDERATION OF THE ANGELS

Chapter I

An Angel is entirely spirit and created perfect: God is uncreated Spirit and altogether perfect.

WE have reached the highest step in our ascension to God, the highest of the steps which may be taken by created beings: for no created substance is more sublime than the angelic if we are speaking only concerning natural perfection. Therefore we will first consider the angels in respect of the excellence of their nature, next in regard to their exalted grace, and last in respect of the offices which they perform. We do not propose to set out a complete discourse concerning angels, but only to touch on such matters as may assist us in raising our mind to God.

Now if an angel be compared with a human and rational soul, it may fitly be called a perfect soul, while the soul may be called an imperfect angel. The prophet speaking of the soul of a reasoning man, says, 'Thou makest him a little lower than the angels':[1] for an angel is a whole and perfect spiritual being; the human soul is divided and imperfect, for it has the form of a body and for this reason is part of the man.

And so an angel is pure spirit, man partly spirit, partly flesh, or partly an angel and partly a beast, as if one were to say, an angel is all gold, man partly gold, partly clay.

[1] Ps. viii. 5.

Wherefore it is true, as the prophet says, that man was made a little lower than the angels, and it is also true that the human soul, being part of a man, is a little less than an angel. Whence it follows that an angel is more like unto God than is a man or his soul, because God is Spirit, not body, and hath no bodily shape. Nevertheless the greater likeness of the angel to God makes plain that God is not a Spirit raised above the angelic sublimity by an infinite distance of honour, for God is uncreated Spirit, eternal, boundless, alone powerful, alone wise, alone good, alone most high.

Wherefore, my soul, if thou dost acknowledge that the angelic nature ought rightly to be reflected by thee, how much more shouldst thou respect and admire the divine nature which surpasses the dignity of angels in every way and beyond all measure.

CHAPTER 2

Of the intelligence and knowledge of the Angels.

BUT not only may it be said that in nature and substance an angel is perfect man and man an imperfect angel, but it is so in regard to intelligence and knowledge. Thus a man, or a human soul, labours hard in matters which have to be learnt, and he must make use of the service of the senses and acquire knowledge little by little as he passes from effect to cause and from cause to effect, while he often remains uncertain, often makes serious mistakes, and seldom arrives at certain knowledge: whereas an angel by one simple intuition understands the matter, perceives at one and the same time causes and their effects, penetrates not only the accidents, but also to the very substance of a matter, and sees not only corporeal things but spiritual.

And so man, while he wanders in this world, in respect of his understanding is not a little less and lower than the angels, but he is so much lowered that a man, though in talent he may be skilled and may give great attention to the pursuit of wisdom, yet when compared with an angel may truly be called a child, or even an infant, a babe.

For rightly did the prophet sing concerning us mortals, 'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise.' [1] Hear Solomon, that very wise man, and what he thinks of the knowledge by which we are so puffed up, 'All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it.' [2] And again: 'He [God] hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.' [3]

If all things are difficult and inexplicable to man, and if a man understands nothing of this visible world from the first created thing unto the last; if, I say, he understand nothing perfectly, as he seeks to unfold its nature, properties, accidents, powers, and the rest which lie hidden: in how many mistakes will he be involved if he attempts to investigate those things which are above the heavens!

Wherefore, O soul, if thou art wise, pursue the knowledge of salvation and the wisdom of the saints which lies in this, that thou fear God and keep his commandments: that prayer delight thee more than disputations, and the charity which buildeth up more than the knowledge which puffeth up; [4] for this is the way that leadeth unto life and the kingdom of heaven, where to us little ones shall be given equality with the angels who 'always behold the face of the Father which is in heaven.' [5]

[1] Ps. viii. 2. [2] Eccles. i. 8. [3] ibid., iii. 11.
[4] 1 Cor. viii. 1. [5] St. Matt. xviii. 10.

CHAPTER 3

The rule exercised by Angels over bodies and the omnipotence of the Creator.

BUT there is a third point in which the human soul is not only a little less but very much beneath an angel: namely, the power and control over bodies. For the human soul has power to move its own body only, by the exercise of its will, it cannot in this way move other bodies; it moves its own body by a progressive movement over the ground, but it cannot suspend it over water or lift it above the air and carry it whither it wills: but angels, by a single motion of their spirit, that is by the exercise of the will, carry heavy bodies aloft and bear them whither they will: thus one angel seized Habbacuc and in a very short space of time carried him to Babylon that he might bring food to Daniel, and then carried him back to Palestine.[1]

Secondly, a man cannot fight against his enemies with his spirit alone, he needs hands and arms: but an angel, without hands and without arms, can war against a whole host of armed men by a single onset of his spirit and can conquer: thus did one angel once slay a hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrians.[2] And if an angel is able to do this, what cannot the Creator and Lord of the angels do? He who made everything out of nothing could, if he willed, bring all things back to nothing.

The human mind, exercising great industry and labour, by the arts of painting and sculpture can form pictures of men, which so represent the living men that they seem to breathe and to be alive; angels, without labour and without hands or tools and almost in a

[1] Bel and the Dragon, 32. [2] 2 Kings xix. 36.

moment of time, can so fashion for themselves a body out of the elements, that it is taken to be a human body, even by wise persons, since it walks, speaks, eats, drinks, is able to be touched and felt and even to be bathed. Thus Abraham prepared food for the angels and washed their feet;[1] and as the Apostle explains he received angels as his guests, believing that he was receiving men.[2] And the same thing happened to his nephew Lot, when he admitted into his house two angels, taking them to be pilgrim men.[3] Again, Raphael the angel spent many days with the young man Tobias, walking, speaking, eating, and drinking, as if he were truly and really a man, and yet afterwards when he was about to depart he said, 'All these days did I appear unto you; but I did neither eat nor drink, but ye did see a vision,' and then suddenly he vanished from their sight.[4]

Great and wonderful power indeed, suddenly to form a body which seemed to differ in no respect from a living human body, and suddenly to dissolve that same body whenever he willed, so that no trace of it remained! And if this power of the angels is so great and so admirable, what must be the power of the Creator of the angels, who made them and gave them the degree of power which he willed? And so our knowledge and that of the angels compared with the knowledge of God is ignorance, and our righteousness and that of the angels is unrighteousness: thus our power and that of the angels, compared with the power of God, is weakness: and therefore in truth God is said to be only wise,[5] only good,[6] the only Potentate.[7]

[1] Gen. xviii. 2. [2] Heb. xiii. 2. [3] Gen. xix. 1.
[4] Tobit xii. 19. [5] Rom. xvi. 27. [6] St. Luke xviii. 19.
[7] 1 Tim. vi. 15.

CHAPTER 4

Of the place and motion of the Angels and of the omnipresence of God.

LASTLY, if we consider the position of angels and of men, we shall find out here also whether or no the soul is not only a little less but very much beneath the angels:[1] I may freely use the word which the Apostle uses. For God gave to the human soul a place on earth, to the angels a place in heaven, that is in his palace, 'All the whole heavens are the Lord's: the earth hath he given to the children of men.'[2]

Hence in Saint Matthew the Lord calls them 'the angels of heaven,'[3] in Saint Luke he says, 'Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth,' and a little later, 'There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.'[4]

And moreover God has so bound the soul to the body that apart from it, it cannot change its place: but God has bound the angels to no body, and he has bestowed on them power to pass very swiftly from heaven to earth and from earth to heaven, or wherever they will. Thus an angel, by the dignity of his nature nearer to God, also by his subtilty, as it were, imitates the omnipresence of God. For God is always everywhere by the immensity of his nature, and since he is everywhere, he is in no need of change of place: an angel by a very swift movement passes from place to place and manifests his presence in all places, so that he appears in some way to be everywhere.

But, my soul, if thou desirest to hear the Lord of the angels, there is no reason why thou shouldst envy that sublime place in which they are, or their exceeding swift motion without fatigue, for not only wilt thou, as a soul, when loosed from the body, be equal unto

[1] Heb. ii. 7. [2] Ps. cxv. 16. [3] St. Matt. xxiv. 36.
[4] St. Luke xv. 7, 10.

the angels, but when thou hast returned to the body which Christ will fashion like unto his glorious body,[1] with that same body thou shalt possess heaven as thine own abode, and that body will become spiritual,[2] and without labour or weariness will forthwith be in that place where thou, its soul, desirest and biddest it to be. For thy Lord doth not deceive thee, and he saith in the Gospel : 'In my Father's house are many mansions,' and, 'I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also';[3] 'Father, I will that they may be with me where I am : that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me.'[4]

And where Christ is, thou knowest, and what sort of body he hath; for thou dost daily acknowledge and dost say, 'The third day he rose again from the dead : he ascended into heaven.'[5]

And thou knowest that after his resurrection his body used to enter among the disciples, the doors being shut;[6] and when he departed he was accustomed to leave them, not by walking, but by vanishing: that is, he was used to move bodily from place to place by a swift motion, as if he were spirit not body.

But if thou aspirest to that glory, it behoves thee first to conform thy body to the body of Christ's humility, that so Christ may conform thy body to his glorious body.

Next it behoves thee to follow his steps, 'For Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps,' says the Apostle Peter: and what are his steps? 'Who did no sin,' he saith, 'neither was guile found in his mouth: who when he was reviled reviled not again, when he suffered he threatened not.'[7]

[1] Phil. iii. 21. [2] 1 Cor. xv. 44. [3] St. John xiv. 2. [4] ibid., xvii. 24.
[5] Apos. Creed. [6] St. John xx. 19. [7] 1 St. Pet. ii. 21.

The steps of Christ are two, and if thou wander from them, thou wilt lose thy way and never wilt reach thy home: it behoves thee not to do evil, but to suffer, and as a consequence to do good and not look for good things to come to thee here: and, that which is the highest of all, it behoves thee to love thy neighbour for God's sake with a true and pure love, a love of friendship and not of passion, freely and not for the sake of a reward from men, content with the reward of God which surpasses all measure.

CHAPTER 5

The kind of grace that is given to Angels and to men.

LET us now come to the dignity of angels according to grace. Truly in this also man is more than a little made lower than the angels.

In the beginning God created the angels separately that he might at the same time form their nature and infuse grace, as Saint Augustine testifies in the books on the City of God.[1] Then as by a single turning of the mind towards God they clave to him by love, they were crowned with bliss and glory, while the wicked were cast down. And so their pilgrimage was very short and their abode in their native land eternal: if indeed that delay can be said to be very short which intervened between their creation and their beatitude.

But we men indeed received grace with our nature when we were created, but in our first parent not in ourselves, and so when he fell we all fell: as the Apostle says, 'In whom all have sinned';[2] and although we have been reconciled to God by the Mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus,[3] yet we are condemned to a long exile, and while we remain in the body, wandering apart from the Lord, we walk by faith and not by sight: and because there is much to distress devout

[1] Aug. *de Civ. Dei*, xii, *c.* 9. [2] Rom. v. 12. [3] 1 Tim. ii. 5.

men who long for their native land, that is, that we have to live in the meanwhile amongst most cruel enemies, there is a danger lest we be surrounded and taken captive and at length be shut out from the possession of that most sweet home.

Hence these words, 'Woe is me that I am constrained to dwell with Mesech: and to have my habitation among the tents of Kedar.' [1]

But although in this respect we are inferior to the angels, yet the loving-kindness of God doth wonderfully console us, not only in that from our race sprang Christ and Mary whom he placed in heaven above all angels, but also because he hath willed to make not a few of mankind superior to many angels by the gift of grace, though they are inferior to them in all the endowments of nature, and some he hath made even equal to the highest angels. Indeed Saint John Chrysostom, expounding the Epistle to the Romans, did not hesitate to place Peter and Paul, the chief of the Apostles, in that place where seraphim fly and glorify God; [2] and the same thing is piously believed of Saint John Baptist and some other saints.

Add to which the good angels after their first service attained to glory, and the evil angels after their first sin were condemned to everlasting punishment: and so men ought not to bemoan the length of the way, since in the course of it they may again and again correct their failings and by penitence attain forgiveness.

CHAPTER 6

The Offices of Angels considered.

IT remains for us to say a few words concerning the duties of angels. They may be said to be five in number.

[1] Ps cxx. 4 [2] Chry. *Hom.* xxxii in *Ep. ad Rom.*

The first is continually to sing praises and hymns to their Creator. And that we may understand how much God values this service, we will consider that the highest angels are appointed to this duty, and that all the choirs of angels follow them as their leaders, and join in chorus with wondrous delight. Hear Isaiah : ' I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.' [1] Here thou hearest the name seraphim, which are the chiefs of the highest order: thou beholdest them covering face and feet, which signifies their reverence, as though they durst not gaze upon their faces or touch their bare feet: thou seest them flying eagerly while they sing, and this signifies their love and desire always increasing of drawing near to God: and these two things are necessary for those who desire to please God, while they sing his praises, namely that to love they should join reverence, and to reverence love, as David the prophet expresses when he says, ' Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice unto him with reverence.' [2] From this thou mayst learn, O my soul, what great veneration is due to God, when those highest princes of heaven who always stand before him and always see his face, though in such exceeding high place and in long familiarity, yet never dare to neglect fear and reverence while they sing his praises.

And what wilt thou answer, thou dust and ashes, when in the judgement thou art charged with sleepiness and wanderings of mind in such a divine work, for which thou wast not worthy ? Learn at least this, since thou art taught by so great an example, that

[1] Isa. vi. 1. [2] Ps. ii. 11.

thou oughtest to perform thy praises and sing thy hymns with fear and trembling, with attention and watchfulness, with love and longing for thy God.

The second office of angels is to offer to God the prayers of mortal men, and to commend them by their own petitions: for thus saith the angel Raphael in the book Tobit, 'When thou didst pray with tears, and when thou didst bury the dead . . . and when thou didst leave thy dinner, I offered thy prayer unto the Lord';[1] and in the Apocalypse John saw an angel standing before the altar with a golden censer: 'And there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.'[2] Here indeed is seen the incredible clemency and pity of our God; for, not content with exhorting us first by his prophets and then by his Son and by his Apostles to pray and make petition, he also added the promise to give whatsoever we shall ask: 'Ask,' he saith, 'and ye shall receive';[3] and elsewhere, 'Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my Name, he shall give it you.'[4] And not content even with this promise, he adds also that he will give a reward to them that ask: 'But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee';[5] a reward, namely, beyond that for which thou hast asked; for thus saith the Lord in the same place concerning almsgiving and fasting, 'Thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee.'[6] But not content with this argument of his fatherly kindness, God hath appointed angels as it were our most intimate attendants, to take charge of the prayers as being memorials of the poor, and to offer them before him and read them, lest any petition of the poor

[1] Tobit xii. 12, Vulg. [2] Apoc. viii. 3. [3] St. Luke xi. 9.
[4] St. John xvi. 23. [5] St. Matt. vi. 6. [6] ibid., vi. 4, 18.

should ever be forgotten. Who of earthly princes ever promised a reward to those approaching him, seeking favour or justice? And yet those who approach the princes of this world are men, as the princes themselves are men, formed of the same clay, and subject to the same God, the highest of all princes. But if it be a great matter to give rewards to those who beg for them, it ought not to seem much to receive them freely and to appoint a faithful attendant to preserve the petitions carefully, and to be solicitous for their quick despatch.

The third office of angels consists in this, that they are sent as ambassadors to declare those things which God desires to make known, and especially those things concerning redemption and eternal salvation: for thus the Apostle speaks to the Hebrews, 'Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation?'[1]

Thus in the Old Testament we see that angels appeared to patriarchs and prophets and made known to them what God had commanded them to make known.[2] So also in the New Testament we read that the archangel Gabriel was sent as a messenger to Zacharias and to the Virgin Mother of God,[3] then that angels were sent to the shepherds, [4] to Saint Joseph,[5] after the Resurrection of our Lord to the women going to the sepulchre,[6] and after the Ascension to all the disciples.[7]

And this seems to be the reason why God, who is in every place and who can easily speak himself within the hearts of men, yet wills to send angels, namely that men may understand that human interests are matters of concern to God and that by him all things are governed and directed; for men might easily

[1] Heb. i. 14. [2] Gen. xviii. 2, xix. 1, xxxii. 1; Dan ix. 21.
[3] St. Luke i. 11, 26. [4] ibid., ii. 9.
[5] St. Matt. i. 20; ii. 13, 19. [6] ibid., xxviii. 2. [7] Acts i. 10.

persuade themselves that divine inspirations were their own reasonings and plans. But when they perceive or hear angels sent by God, and that the things foretold by angels happen as they foretold, they cannot doubt that God exercises a providence over human affairs and that those matters are especially directed and arranged by him which appertain to the eternal salvation of the elect.

The fourth office of the angels is to protect men, both individually and in a multitude : for the loving-kindness of God our Father is pleased to commit to these his most faithful servants the infirmities of mortals and to place them in authority, now as it were fulfilling the duties of a guide to youths, of guardian to little children, of patron to followers, of shepherd to sheep, of physician to the sick, of defender of the weak, of protector of those who cannot defend themselves without taking refuge beneath the wings of others more powerful than they.

Concerning the protection and guardianship of individual persons, David is witness, 'He hath given his angels charge concerning thee, to keep thee in all thy ways';[1] so also, a most faithful witness, Christ himself, saith, 'Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.'[2]

Concerning the protection of states and kingdoms, Daniel is witness, for he calls the angels protectors of the Persian kingdom, the Prince of Persia, and the protector of the Grecian kingdom he names King of Grecia, and the protector of the children of Israel he calls by the name Michael.[3]

And lastly concerning the protector of the Churches, John writes in the Apocalypse, where he makes mention of the angel of the Church at Ephesus and of the

[1] Ps. xci. 11. [2] St. Matt. xviii. 10. [3] Dan. x. 13.

angel of the Church at Smyrna and so of other Churches.[1]

And so in every kingdom there are two kings, one visible, a man, and one invisible, namely an angel; and in the Catholic Church universal there are two high priests appointed under Christ the Lord, one visible, a man, and one invisible, an angel, whom we believe to be the archangel Michael: for as of old he was venerated as protector of the synagogue of the Jews, so now of the Christian Church.

Seest thou not, O soul, how solicitous for us is that High Majesty who is in no need of our goods? What could he do to show forth his great love that he hath not done? He hath laden us with benefits that we should willingly abide with him: he hath surrounded us with guardians lest we should be snatched away: what would he do if we were indeed a treasure in his sight? And truly he himself is our great and only treasure.

Therefore, my soul, yield thyself sometimes to this love, and when thou considerest the immensity of this love of him who loves thee, yield thy whole being, holding no part back, to his service and good pleasure, hand it over, give it by an irrevocable oath and vow: let none of those things that are seen influence thee, but consider those that are not seen, and yearn after them, 'For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.'[2]

The last office of the angels is to be also soldiers and armed leaders. 'To bind their kings in chains and their nobles with links of iron.'[3] There are angels who burnt up wicked cities with fire and brimstone,'[4] who slew the firstborn of all Egypt,[5] who smote many thousand Assyrians at one blow;[6] and there will be angels who at the last day 'shall sever the wicked from

[1] Apoc. ii. and iii. [2] 2 Cor. iv. 18. [3] Ps. cxlix. 8.
[4] Gen. xix. 13. [5] Exod. xii. 12. [6] 2 Kings xix. 35.

among the just and shall cast them into the furnace of fire.' [1] Therefore devout men should love their fellow citizens, the holy angels: let the wicked fear the power of the angels, ministers of the wrath of God Almighty, and from their hands none will be able to deliver them.

[1] St. Matt. xiii. 49.

TENTH STEP

CONSIDERATION OF THE ESSENCE OF GOD BY COMPARING THE MAGNITUDE OF BODIES

Chapter I

The greatness of God considered in a general way from the four dimensions of bodies.

WE have ascended as far as we are able by means of created substances: but we have not yet attained to that degree of the knowledge of God which it is possible to reach by consideration, even in this vale of tears.

And so it remains for us to see whether, by the dimensions of bodily quantity which we understand, we can rise to the length and breadth and height and depth of the Essence of God: for in things created those are considered to be great whose four dimensions are great.

Now in the Psalms and elsewhere God is said to be great,[1] and of his greatness there is no end.[2]

Indeed, Saint Bernard, a remarkable contemplative, made for himself from these dimensions steps to the knowledge of God, which he wrote in his books concerning contemplation to Pope Eugenius. And he was not the first to invent ladders of this kind; he learnt this method of ascension from the Apostle who penetrated into the third heaven and into Paradise;[3]

[1] Deut. x. 17; Pss. xcv. 3, cxlvii. 5, and others. [2] Ps. cxlv. 3.
[3] 2 Cor. xii. 2.

for thus speaks the Apostle in his Epistle to the Ephesians, 'That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height.' [1]

If any one will consider carefully, he will surely find that there is nothing complete or solid outside of God, and that everything is narrow, short, lowly, and empty, or superficial: but that in God there is true breadth, immensity; true length, eternity; true height, sublimity of nature; true depth without limit, incomprehensibility: and again true height, omnipotence; true depth, infinite wisdom; true breadth, fullest bowels of mercy; true length, discerning judgement, that is perfect righteousness.

Now, if we wish to ascend and to find what we are seeking, it is not enough for us to touch lightly on these considerations, but it behoves us to understand fully, as the Apostle says, 'That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height.' That person comprehends who, considering very attentively, is altogether persuaded that he grasps the matter, and is so persuaded that he sells all his possessions and hastens to buy the treasure he has found; [2] and so the Apostle adds 'with all saints.' Indeed the saints alone comprehend fully, and no one comprehends those things as he ought without becoming holy.

And what we have said agrees with the words of Saint Augustine in his letter to Honoratus. He says that the Apostle is portraying the Cross of Christ when he writes of breadth and length and height and depth; [3] for as he himself teaches, the breadth corresponds to the transverse beam to which the hands of the Crucified were fixed: the length corresponds to the long beam to which the Body of the Crucified was fastened; the height corresponds to the portion placed at the

[1] Eph. iii. 18. [2] St. Matt. xiii. 44. [3] St. Aug. *Ep.* cxx.

head of the Cross, on which the title was; the depth corresponds to that part of the tree which lay hidden fixed in the ground. I say that Saint Augustine does not contradict our explanation, but rather wonderfully assists it, for the Cross of Christ is the way to attain to true breadth and length and height and depth: for though to the eyes of men the Cross may seem narrow and short and low and not very deep, yet in truth it spreads its arms from east to west, and from north to south, that is, it spread its glory far and wide by the preaching of the Apostles, and it raised its top to the highest heaven, and as a key opened it to the elect and penetrated even to the lowest depth of hell which it for ever closed to these elect.

CHAPTER 2

The breadth of the Being of God is the immensity of his perfections.

LET us begin with the Essence and then pass on to the attributes. The Essence may well be called very wide for many reasons. First it is in itself very wide, and specially immense because it embraces all perfections of created things and also the perfections of those things which might be created, and numberless others: for whatever hath been made or will be made, or could be made, without doubt is contained in a more remarkable degree and manner in God. All other things are good with some qualification, such as a good man, a good horse, a good house, a good garment, and so of all the rest: but God is All-good: for when Moses said, 'Show me thy glory,' God answered him, 'I will make all my goodness pass before thee.'[1]

If a man possessed a thing at home which contained all objects of the senses in highest perfection, so that he never wished to leave his house in order to see or

[1] Exod. xxxiii. 18.

hear or smell or taste or touch elsewhere, since he had at home in that one thing a degree of pleasure as great as any man could wish for, would not that thing be something remarkably precious? But if in addition the object contained within itself such great wealth of all kinds of riches, as a man covetous beyond measure can desire, so that he had no wish to leave his house to gain something more, would not that thing be still more precious and costly?

And again, if that thing could offer to those who possessed it honours and dignities, such as the most ambitious of men can conceive, would it not seem to be beyond all price? And if that thing could fulfil the desire not only of men, but of angels, which is a matter of greater importance, since angels know more and better things than men, what wilt thou say? And yet the goodness of the thing would still be far inferior to the goodness of God, which is so great that it is able to satisfy and to fulfil the infinite longing, or rather the infinite capacity of God himself.

O admirable breadth of the perfection of the Being of God, which embraces such immensity of good that it is altogether sufficient for the infinite capacity which is in God! For God never goes beyond himself, since he has all good within himself: and before the world was made he was so rich and happy and afterwards was so, because God made nothing which did not always exist in himself in a higher mode.

Dost thou understand, O soul, what is the kind of good thou wilt enjoy in thy native land if thou hast loved God on the way thither? And of what kind of good thou wilt be deprived if thou hast not loved him? For God will show himself, that is, the All-good, to be enjoyed by those who love him, when he will say to the good and faithful servant, 'Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'[1]

[1] St. Matt. xxv. 23.

CHAPTER 3

The breadth of the Divine Essence is the immensity of God which filleth all things.

NEXT, God is immense in another way, because he altogether fills all the things which are in creation : 'Do not I fill heaven and earth ? saith the Lord.' [1] And if there were more worlds, he would fill them all: 'If I climb up into heaven,' saith David, 'thou art there: if I go down to hell, thou art there also.' [2] I will add also this, if I go above heaven, or beneath heaven, or beyond heaven, I shall not be alone, for thou wilt be there, and I cannot exist unless I am in thee, and thou bearest me, thou who bearest all things along by the word of thy power. [3]

Not only does God fill all bodies with his immensity, but also spirits, hearts, minds : for how should he search the heart unless he was within it, [4] and how should he hearken unto the prayer of our hearts [5] unless he held his ear to our hearts ? And how should the prophet say, 'I will hearken what the Lord God will say concerning me,' [6] unless God brought near his mouth to the ears of our heart ?

Happy soul who loveth God, since he keepeth his beloved always beside him, cherisheth and will cherish him in his bosom : 'He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.' [7] Not only does God fill all things with his presence, but he also fills them with his glory. For the seraphim cry, 'The whole earth is full of his glory,' [8] and David adds, 'O Lord our Governor, how excellent is thy Name in all the world: thou that hast set thy glory above the heavens '; [9] as if he said: not only hath thy name, thy fame, and thy

[1] Jer. xxiii. 24. [2] Ps. cxxxix. 7. [3] Heb. i. 3.
[4] Ps. vii. 10. [5] Pss. xxvii. 8, cxix. 145. [6] Ps. lxxxv. 8.
[7] 1 St. John iv. 16. [8] Isa. vi. 3. [9] Ps. viii. 1.

glory filled the whole world with wonder, but it hath ascended to heaven and is raised above the heavens. And lastly the Wise Man adds, 'The work thereof [of the sun] is full of the glory of the Lord';[1] for there is no creature in heaven or in earth which does not eagerly praise God. And this is the reason why David in the Psalms[2] and the three children with Daniel[3] exhort all creatures to bless and magnify their Creator. For they knew that very many creatures were not of such a nature as to be able to hear the word of exhortation, but because they understood that all the works of God are good, and for this reason are able to praise their Maker by their own being, they congratulated them and exhorted them to do what they were doing.

And indeed, if any one possessed eyes within, he would see that all the works of the Lord are as censers sending upwards a sweet odour to the glory of God: and if he had ears within he would hear as it were a harmony of all kinds of musical instruments praising God and saying, 'It is he that hath made us and not we ourselves.'[4]

For although there are not wanting wicked men who curse God and blaspheme his Name, yet they also, though they be unwilling, are compelled to praise the Lord in the way in which a work praises its maker: for in them also shines forth wonderfully the power of God, by which he made them, and the wisdom by which he governs them, and the goodness by which he suffers the ungrateful and preserves life to the evil, and his mercy and justice by which he ordains them rightly to punishment or mercifully awaits their repentance. Indeed many on the earth are deaf to these voices of creatures which should be heard, and yet they do not cease to cry aloud: there are not lacking innumerable ears of angels and of holy men which

[1] Ecclus. xlii. 16. [2] Ps. cxviii. 1.
[3] Song of the Three Holy Children. [4] Ps. c. 2.

listen to those praises and take delight in them, and they themselves also magnify God their Creator with hymns and songs.

CHAPTER 4

The length of the Divine Essence is his Eternity.

Now the length of the divine Essence is his eternity, which hath no beginning of duration nor will ever have an end, and will always abide the same without any change: 'But thou art the same and thy years shall not fail,' saith David,[1] and so Tobit,[2] and after him the Apostle.[3] They call God the Everlasting King, because he alone is not subject to time, but is before all ages and rules all ages, since he alone precedes all ages. Other things either have a beginning and end and never abide in one state, or they have a beginning and no ending and that without change of substance, but they can cease to exist, if it so please their Creator. And thus eternity so belongs to God alone that it is unsuitable to a created thing, and there was never a prince, however arrogant, who presumed to arrogate to himself amongst the titles, however many, which he might take, that of 'everlasting,' unless perchance it might be with another meaning, in the way in which Constantius was called 'Eternal Emperor,' because he was not emperor for a certain time, but for his life.

But, my soul, thou canst be reckoned amongst both kinds of creatures: for thou hast a body which had a beginning when it was conceived and born, and little by little grew to that size ordained for it by God: but later it begins to diminish, and a little after, dying, it ceases to exist, and thus it never remains in the same state in every part at every hour: it is subject to change. Concerning thy body, the prophet put forward this opinion under the similitude of grass: 'They fade

[1] Ps. cii. 27 [2] Tobit xiii. 6. [3] 1 Tim. i. 17.

away suddenly like the grass. In the morning it is green and groweth up: but in the evening it is cut down, dried up, and withered.' [1] *In the morning*, that is in boyhood, the human body flourishes like the grass, but soon it passes on to youth: in the noontide of youth it flourishes and forthwith passes to old age: *in the evening* of old age it fails, it is cut down in death, it is withered in the grave and turns again to its dust. See therefore, O soul, how far thy body is from being eternal!

But thou wast created in time, when before thou wast nothing, and in this thou art very unlike thine eternal Maker. But being created, thou dost not perceive the end of duration, a quality which thou possessest in common with thy Creator: and because, whilst thou livest in the body, thou art changeable, thou passest from vice to virtue and from virtue to vice; and in whatever condition thou art found when thou departest from the body, in that thou wilt be judged, either to reign for ever with God, or to endure torments for ever with the devil. And so there is nothing more important for thee than to see that thou fleest vice and followest virtue.

Beware, therefore, lest thou be led by the deceit of the flesh, to the eternal harm thereof and loss to thyself: but crucify thy flesh with its affections and lusts,[2] that after a little while not only mayst thou live for ever happy, but thy flesh also will rise again in glory and will itself abide for ever united with thee in the eternity of God.

Although the souls of other happy beings, as the holy angels, will be partakers of the eternity of God in that most sublime and happy union with him in the beatific vision and love, in a union which not only will have no end, but will be always stable and unmoved: yet in many other ways they will be able to change and

[1] Ps. xc. 6. [2] Gal. v. 24.

vary their thoughts, their affections, and their abode: they will always wonder and rise up above themselves to the eternity of God in which there can be no change of mind or will or place; yet nothing will be lacking in this union, since it will always possess all those things which by various changes throughout eternity it could gather to itself.

Wherefore the length of eternity is an infinite thing and no less appropriate to God than the breadth of immensity.

CHAPTER 5

The height of God signifies the nobility of the Divine Nature, which is the first and highest efficient cause of all things, their pattern and their end.

THE sublimity of God is next to be considered, according to which it is said to God, 'Thou only art the Most Highest.'[1] Now God alone is most high by the nobility of his nature: for things are nobler and higher in proportion as they are purer and more withdrawn from material things. We perceive this first of all in corporeal things: for water is more noble than earth, because it is purer; and for the same reason air is more noble than water, fire than air, and the heaven than fire.

Next, we perceive it in spiritual matters: for the intellect is higher than sense, for sense has a bodily organ which the intellect does not require, and the angelic intelligence is higher than the human, since the latter needs the service of the imagination and fancy, which the former does not require; and among the angels those are the higher who by means of the fewer forms understand more things.

Therefore God, who alone is pure Act and is in need of nothing outside himself, of no instrument or imagination or form and not even the presence of any

[1] Ps. lxxxiii. 18.

object outside himself, but his own Essence is all things to him, can have nothing which he has not always by his act, and he possesseth himself by act and his being is always a pure and simple act: and so his Nature is the very highest and most sublime and can in no way have an equal; and for this reason, that one who said, 'I will be like the Most High' was suddenly overthrown and fell from heaven into deepest hell, as Isaiah describes,[1] and Christ the Lord saith concerning him, 'I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.'[2]

There is another way in which God is most High, namely that he is the first and highest efficient Cause of all things, their Pattern and their End. He is the highest efficient Cause, since there is nothing created which has in any way a power of working which does not derive its strength from God, and God derives strength from none. Again, there is no cause which can exercise its strength unless it be moved by God, and God is moved by none: and lastly, all other higher causes in created things are those which are called universal, and are derived from these particular causes, as the heavens and the angels who move the heavens, but God made both the heavens and the angels. Therefore he alone is the first and highest efficient Cause.

And again, he is the first exemplary Cause, for God made all things according to forms or ideas, which he holds in himself. And, lastly, he is the final Cause, because he created all things on account of himself, that is, for the setting forth of his glory, as the Wise Man saith in Proverbs.[3] But far more fittingly is it said and is the fact, that God is Most High because he sitteth on the highest throne: 'I saw the Lord,' saith Isaiah, 'sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up';[4] and since he useth two thrones, the one for judgement, the other for rest, let us consider each separately.

[1] Isa. xiv. 14. [2] St. Luke x. 18. [3] Prov. xvi. 4. [4] Isa. vi. 1.

CHAPTER 6

God hath the highest throne : for he is supreme King and Judge, bestowing grace upon the humble.

FIRST, then, God hath the highest throne because he is supreme judge : for Abraham saith unto God, ' Shall not the judge of all the earth do right ? ' [1] and David, ' He is a judge among gods,' [2] that is, God judges those judges who are called in Scripture gods. [3] But most plainly Saint James says, ' There is one lawgiver,' [4] that is, God alone is properly lawgiver and judge, because he alone gives laws to all and receives laws from none, judges every one and is judged by none.

Next, God is not only judge, but he is also king, and this not as a judge appointed by a king, but as king and supreme ruler ; whence he is called ' King of kings,' [5] and ' A great king above all gods,' [6] and ' Wonderful among the kings of the earth ' : [7] because when he wills he transfers kingdoms and governments from nation to nation, and when he wills he withdraws the spirit of princes.

Again, not only is God supreme judge and king, but also absolute Lord, which is the highest title of all. For kings are not lords over their subjects in such a way that they can, by their own decision, despoil them of goods or of life : of this let King Ahab be a witness, for he desired to possess the vineyard of Naboth and was unable to get it without the treachery and intrigue of his wife,[8] and so both perished miserably.

But God is truly and properly Lord, all things serve him, and he himself serves no one, and he could, if he willed, bring all things to naught, since he made all things out of nothing.

Therefore reflect, O soul, how great fear and

[1] Gen. xviii. 25. [2] Ps. lxxxii. 1.
[3] Exod. xxii. 28 ; Ps. lxxxii. 6 ; St. John x. 34. [4] St. Jas. iv. 12.
[5] Apoc. xix. 16. [6] Ps. xcv. 3. [7] Ps. lxxvi. 12. [8] 1 Kings xxi.

trembling is due from us worms of earth before him who sitteth upon a throne so lofty that he hath nothing at all above him. 'If I be a master, where is my fear?' he saith by the prophet Malachi;[1] and if those highest princes of heaven wait upon him with fear and dread, what is fitting for us to do who, as frail mortals, dwell upon the earth along with beasts?

But this is an astonishing thing, that the Most High God should love not only created beings like unto himself, that is the high and lofty, but also the humble and poor: thus God saith by Isaiah, 'To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word';[2] and David saith, 'The Lord is high . . . and yet humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and earth.'[3] Indeed God does love high and sublime beings which in this respect are like unto himself: but those which are truly sublime, not those which seem to be so, and are not. And so God does not love the proud, who are elated and puffed up, and who ought not to be called high and sublime: but he loves the humble who tremble at his word, because the more they abase themselves, the more are they exalted by the Lord himself, and those are truly high who are exalted by the Lord. And so these are both humble and lofty: humble in their own eyes, lofty in the eyes of God.

If any one were to look, not only with bodily eyes, but also with the eyes of the mind, and these illuminated by God, upon the rich man feasting, clothed with fine linen and purple, seated at a table laden with all kinds of costly food, with many servants in attendance, all carefully fulfilling their duties, and if at the same time he were to see Lazarus, half naked and full of sores, sitting at the rich man's gate and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fall from the rich man's table: he would assuredly see that the rich man, believed by

[1] Mal. i. 6. [2] Isa. lxvi. 2. [3] Ps. cxiii. 4.

the world to be most happy, was altogether abominable and most vile in the eyes of God and of the angels, indeed like unto mud or dung of the earth, 'For that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God,'[1] as saith the Lord, in that place where he describes the rich man at the feast: but on the other hand, he would see Lazarus, though poor and lowly, noble and honoured in the eyes of God and the angels, as a precious pearl. And this is made plain by their departure from the world, for angel hands carried Lazarus, as one dear to God, into the bosom of Abraham, and the rich man, as hateful to God, was borne by demons to the fire of hell.[2]

But why should I speak of Lazarus? No one is higher in the sight of God than our Lord Jesus Christ according to his humanity, and yet no one is found in heaven or earth more lowly than he, as he most truly said, 'Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart':[3] for as that most holy soul knew more clearly than all created things the infinite height of the divinity, so also he knew more the vileness of the creature, which was made out of nothing, and so since his holy soul was created, beyond all others he subjects himself to God, and humbles himself and exalts God, and in turn is exalted by God above all creatures, even the angels.

We may say the same of the blessed angels and of holy men: for none are more humble than those who are seated high in heaven, since they who are nearer to God see more clearly how great a distance separates the greatness of the Creator from the smallness of the creature.

Wherefore, my soul, if thou desirest true exaltation, love humility; imitate the Lamb without spot, imitate the Virgin Mother, imitate the cherubim and seraphim, for the higher these are, so the more humble they are.

[1] St. Luke xvi. 15. [2] ibid., xvi. 19. [3] St. Matt. xi. 29.

CHAPTER 7

The Throne of the Most High signifies the blessed and beatifying rest of God.

NOT only hath God a very high throne, because he judges all men, but also because he rests beyond all and makes those to rest in whom he has his dwelling. The most high throne of God is his highest rest: for although he rules the whole world, in which there is a perpetual warfare, conflicts of elements, of beasts and of men, yet he himself judges with equity, as is said in the book of Wisdom,[1] and he even rejoices in the highest peace, and there is naught able to disturb his repose and the contemplation of himself in which are his eternal delights. For this reason he is called King of Jerusalem, which is 'Vision of peace.'[2]

But his proper thrones are the blessed spirits, whence it is said, 'Thou that sittest upon the cherubims.'[3] God is said to sit upon the cherubim rather than upon the seraphim, because the cherubim signifies the greatness of knowledge, seraphim rather the ardour of charity: repose follows wisdom, and care and anxiety follow charity, unless it be joined with wisdom. And so the soul of the righteous man is called the home of wisdom.[4]

And lastly when Isaiah says, 'Heaven is my throne,'[5] and when David says, 'All the whole heavens are the Lord's,'[6] by the heavens are to be understood the spiritual heavens dwelling above the corporeal heavens, that is, the blessed spirits, as Saint Augustine explained in his exposition of the hundred and thirteenth Psalm.[7]

But God made these heavens to rest in such wonder-

[1] Wisd. xii. 18, Vulg. *tranquillitate.*
[2] Tobit xiii. 9; Ps. cxvi. 16; Ecclus. xxiv. 11.
[3] Pss. lxxx. 1, xcix. 1. [4] Prov. viii. 12; Isa. xi. 2.
[5] Isa. lxvi. 1. [6] Ps. cxv. 16. [7] Vulg.

ful calm which may be that 'peace which passeth all understanding.'[1] Saint Bernard in his Sermons on the Canticles makes a very apt comparison in explanation of this rest: he says, 'The God of peace renders all things peaceful, and the soul, looking up with fixed gaze at his ineffable stillness, is itself awed into quiescence. It is as if one beheld some king or great judge, who after hearing causes in his court all the day long, dismisses his crowds of attendants, puts an end to the labours of his office, returns with night to his peaceful palace, enters into his chamber with those few companions whom he condescends to honour with his intimacy in private, and there enjoys his repose with the more confidence because it is in such complete retirement, and because, as he looks peacefully around, he sees only the faces of those who are dear to him.'[2] He shows clearly enough that God does not manifest himself to the spirits of the blessed as their judge, but rather as their friend and beloved. And this familiarity is indeed incredible, that God should offer to the pure in heart even in this life the fulfilment of the words, 'My delights were with the sons of men,'[3] and again, 'His secret is with the righteous.'[4]

Hence it comes to pass that all the Saints, though they suffered oppression in the world, yet always kept peace in their heart where God dwelt, and therefore they were always joyful, always appeared calm and indeed were so: for the Truth itself said to them, 'Your heart shall rejoice and your joy no man taketh from you.'[5]

CHAPTER 8

Of the manifold depth in the Being of God.

THERE remains the fourth dimension of magnitude, which is called depth. Now depth in respect of the

[1] Phil. iv. 7. [2] Serm. xxiii in Cant. [3] Prov. viii. 31.
[4] ibid., iii. 32. [5] St. John xvi. 22.

Being of God is found to be multiform: first divinity in itself in very deep, because it is not superficial or slender, but very full and very solid. The Deity is not, as it were, a gilded mass, which has gold only on its surface, but within is brazen or wooden, but it is, as it were, a mass wholly gold, and a great and immense mass, or rather a mine of gold so deep that it can never be exhausted by digging; thus God is altogether incomprehensible. Just as a mine of gold, whose depth cannot be reached, is never exhausted by digging, so also God, of 'whose greatness there is no end,'[1] is never so perfectly known by a created mind but that it always seeks to know more and more, and God alone comprehends the infinite depths, for he alone has an infinite power of understanding.

Next, God is deep by reason of place: for as he is Most High because he rules over all things and is above all, so also he is most deep because he is beneath all things, that he may uphold them, and he is within all things, that he may bear them: for he himself, as the Apostle says, 'Upholdeth all things by the word of his power.'[2] And so God is, as it were, the foundation and the roof of the building, 'in whom we live and move and have our being':[3] and therefore very rightly did Solomon say, 'The heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee,'[4] or rather God indeed contains the heavens and those things that are under the heavens, since he is above the heavens and beneath the earth.

Secondly, the depth of God is his invisibility. For God is Light but Light unapproachable:[5] he is Truth, but exceeding profound, and more interior than any interior thing: 'He maketh darkness his secret place,' saith David;[6] and as Isaiah says, 'Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself.'[7] Saint Augustine, at

[1] Ps. cxlv. 3. [2] Heb. i. 3. [3] Acts xvii. 28. [4] 1 Kings viii. 27.
[5] 1 Tim. vi. 11. [6] Ps. xviii. 11. [7] Isa. xlv. 15.

a time when he was seeking after God, sent his eyes as messengers from earth to the heavens, and everything gave him answer, 'We are not what thou seekest, but he it is who made us.' And so, not finding God by rising through exterior things, he began to make his way through interior things and learnt indeed to reach unto God more easily by means of these: for he learnt that the soul was better than the body, and the interior sense better than the exterior, and the intellect, which to a certain extent is interior, he saw to be better than an interior sense. Thence he made out that God, who is more interior than the intellect, is better than the intellect: and by this we understand something, or we consider that a thing is not God but something less than God, since God is better than we can understand or think.

Well, then, my soul, if thou art better than thy body, to which thou givest life, because that is body and thou art spirit, and the eye of thy body seeth thee not, because that is outside and thou art within, think thus: thy God is better than thou art, because he giveth thee intelligence, and he is, as it were, thy soul: and therefore thou canst not see him because a spirit is higher and more within than thou art, and thou in a certain way remainest without, and it is within, in its own most secret and deep recess. But wilt thou forever be refused admittance to that secret place? God forbid. Thy Lord doth not lie, and he said, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,'[1] and the Apostle says, 'Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face,'[2] and the holy Evangelist John writes, 'We know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.'[3]

And what will be the joy when, admitted to that secret sanctuary, thou beholdest and possessest that very light, that form, that goodness! Then it will be

[1] St. Matt. v. 8. [2] 1 Cor. xiii. 12. [3] 1 St. John iii. 2.

very plain how empty and fleeting and as nothing have been the temporal good things of this earth with which men become inebriated and then forget the things which are true and everlasting. But if thou art really athirst for the living God, and if tears are thy meat day and night while they say unto thee, 'Where is now thy God?'[1] thou wilt not be slow to cleanse thy heart wherein God is to be seen, and thou wilt not be weary in raising thy heart on high until 'unto the God of gods appeareth every one in Sion';[2] and thou wilt not grow cold in the love of God and thy neighbour, and thou wilt not 'love in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth,'[3] for this is the way that leadeth to life.

[1] Ps. xlii. 3. [2] Ps. lxxxiv. 7. [3] 1 St. John iii. 18.

ELEVENTH STEP

CONSIDERATION OF THE GREATNESS OF THE POWER OF GOD BY COMPARISON WITH THE MAGNITUDE OF BODIES

Chapter 1

Concerning the breadth of the power of God.

GREAT is the Lord and of his greatness there is no measure or end: not alone is he great because his height is omnipotence, his depth wisdom unsearchable, his breadth mercy shown forth in every place, his length righteousness like unto a rod of iron: but also because each of these separate attributes is great with the magnitude of infinite breadth, length, depth, and height.

And as by a power, or rather by omnipotence, we are kept in place: the power of God has its own breadth which exists in him, so that he reaches forth to things which have no limit.

For first, he reaches forth to all things that are made: for there is nothing in this whole universe of things from the first angel to the last little worm, and from the highest heaven to the lowest hell, which was not made by the power of God: 'All things,' saith Saint John, 'were made by him, and without him nothing was made that is made'; and further on, 'The world was made by him.'[1]

Secondly, he reaches to all things which throughout eternity shall ever be. For as nothing could be made except by him, so also nothing will ever be made

[1] St. John i. 3, 10.

except by him: for thus saith the Apostle, 'Of him, and through him, and to him are all things.' [1]

Thirdly, he reaches to all things which might be, though they should never exist: for thus saith the angel, 'With God nothing shall be impossible': [2] and the Lord himself said, 'With God all things are possible.' [3]

Fourthly, he reaches out to the complete destruction of things that are made. For as God was able to destroy by the flood of waters all the men and all the living creatures which were upon the earth, except the few whom he willed to preserve in the ark of Noah,[4] so will he be able by a flood of fire in a moment to destroy not only all men and all living creatures which will be found living at the last day, but also all trees and all cities and everything else that is in the earth. The Apostle Peter says in his second Epistle, 'The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.' [5]

Great indeed is this breadth of the power of God, which man cannot sufficiently admire unless he be able to enumerate the multitude of things which God hath made, will make, or can make.

But who can number this multitude save he whose knowledge is infinite? And again, the greatness of his power increases exceedingly. Let any one consider how great it must be in order to dissolve almost in one moment, with the greatest ease, what has taken so much power and such long ages to form: or as Judas Maccabeus says, 'Who at a beck can cast down both them that come against us, and also all the world.' [6]

Let us say therefore with Moses, 'Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the mighty ones?' [7]

[1] Rom. xi. 36. [2] St. Luke i. 37. [3] St. Matt. xix. 26. [4] Gen. vii. 1. [5] 2 St. Pet. iii. 10. [6] 2 Macc. viii. 18. [7] Exod. xv. 11, marg.

CHAPTER 2

Of the length of the power of God.

Now the length of the divine power is perceived in this, that God himself works continuously with all that he has made, and he will never be weary: indeed that power of God cannot be lessened or weakened or broken in any way, since it is united with true eternity, or rather it is itself the eternity of true divinity.

Many persons marvel how the sun and moon and stars can be moved in such regularity and such swiftness from rising to setting, and without intermission turn in their own orbits; and indeed the matter would be most worthy of all admiration, did we not know that they are borne along by the Almighty God, who 'upholds all things by the word of his power.' [1]

And others wonder because God bears and sustains all things and is not wearied by bearing and sustaining such an immense mass of wellnigh infinite weight: for a strong man, or a horse, or an ox, or an elephant can bear a great weight for a short time, or carry a heavy burden for a short time: but to bear an immense weight always without fatigue is beyond the strength of all created beings. These persons would rightly marvel if God had strength in such weight and measure as all created things possess it: but since the strength of God completely surpasses all measures, and since he himself is unlimited in every respect, it is not wonderful if his infinite strength upholds a mass, however weighty it be, for an unlimited time and without weariness.

Therefore again let us say with the holy prophet Moses, 'Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the mighty ones?' [2]

[1] Heb. i. 3. [2] Exod. xv. 11, marg.

CHAPTER 3

Of the height of the power of God.

THERE follows the height of the power of God, which consists chiefly in two things.

First, omnipotence may be called very high, because it alone makes exceeding high things. In the first creation of things God alone made those things which are beneath the moon, but they have the power, through the action of other created things, to be generated, transformed, corrupted: for the elements mutually work changes one on another, according to their functions: thus from the earth herbs and trees are brought forth: animals are produced from animals: fishes are born in water, clouds and rain in the air, comets in fire. But the heaven and the stars, which are the highest bodies, God alone created, alone he preserves them, and no created being can possess the power of forming or transforming, of dissolving or even preserving, any. 'I will consider,' saith the prophet, 'thy heavens, even the works of thy fingers: the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained': [1] for the Most High reserved to himself the highest works, he himself began to build for the foundation, and he himself brought them to full completion.

So also spiritual things, angels and the souls of men, which are the most noble and sublime of all works, the Most High alone, by his infinite power, formed and preserves and will preserve eternally from destruction: and in these actions created beings have no share: and although they were all to join in one act, they could never produce or destroy one single angel or one single soul.

Next, the height of the divine power is seen very clearly in miracles which, as Saint Augustine teaches,

[1] Ps. viii. 3.

are works which are wrought apart from the usual cause of nature, and which are the admiration and wonder of nature, even of the angels themselves.[1] Which of the angels was not astonished when, at the command of Joshua, the sun and moon, always being borne along in a very swift course, stood immovable?[2] And lest it should be thought that this happened by accident (and no one could imagine that such an unusual thing could be done by any mortal man in the world), the Holy Spirit speaks and says, 'The Lord hearkened to the voice of man.'[3] For Joshua did not, strickly speaking, address the sun itself or the moon, for he knew they could not hear his command, but he prayed the Lord, as if he had said by the command of the Lord, 'Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon, and thou moon in the valley of Ajalon.' 'And the Lord hearkened to the voice of a man, that is, he caused those luminaries to obey the voice of a man. For often in sacred speech the Lord is said to do things, by reason of which they happen: as in Genesis the Lord says to Abraham, 'Now I know that thou fearest God.'[4] The meaning of these words is, 'Now I have caused it to be known by thee and by others that thou truly fearest God.'

Such also was the work which manifested the height of divine power when, in the Lord's Passion, the moon, which was at that time a long distance from the sun, approached it by a very swift motion, and being beneath it, caused darkness over the earth for three hours, and when those three hours were passed, returned with a marvellous rapidity to that place whence it had moved: Saint Dionysius the Areopagite testifies in his Epistle to Saint Polycarp that he saw and observed all these things.

And this is indeed a contrary sign to the former,

[1] St. Aug. in *Joan. Tract* xxiv. [2] Joshua x. 12. [3] ibid., x. 14. [4] Gen. xxii. 12.

but not less to be wondered at, since it is an equally new and unusual thing and one surpassing the power of all nature, to cause the moon to stand still or to make it move out of its usual course.

I omit the enlightening of the blind, the raising of the dead, and many other miracles of that kind which God hath done and still does by his prophets and apostles and other of his faithful servants: these all cry aloud, 'Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the mighty ones?'

But I cannot omit that highest and greatest miracle which God will show in the Last Day when all the dead will rise at once, when many bodies having been reduced to ashes and dispersed, having been either consumed by beasts and converted into other things and other bodies, or having been buried in gardens and fields, have been transformed and passed into herbs of various kinds, shall then rise.

What angel will not be astounded when he sees in the twinkling of an eye so many thousands of thousands of men, at the command of the Almighty, take again their bodies, though through many ages and in divers ways these have been dispersed or consumed and hidden away. This is therefore the height of the power of God, and by reason of it again we may say, 'Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the mighty ones?'

CHAPTER 4

Of the depth of the power of God.

THERE remains the depth, which seems to me to consist in the method which God uses in working: for who can penetrate the manner in which something is made out of nothing? To this depth it was not possible for those to turn their eyes, who declared that the beginning was explored and certain, that nothing was made of nothing. And we also in this matter

believe what we have not seen: [1] but we believe a true God who cannot lie.[2] We believe, I say, that the heaven and the earth and the things in them were made by God himself, while nothing had been in existence before, from which they could be made. But how a thing could be made when nothing went before it, is a profound abyss which we cannot scrutinize or investigate.

Next, not only did God make everything out of nothing, but he made them in nothing, that is without space or place existing before, in which what was made could be placed, a thing which can scarcely be understood, especially in regard to corporeal things. Hence this abyss is also impenetrable. Take away the spaces of places from bodies, says Saint Augustine in his letter to Dardanus, and they will be nowhere: and since they will be nowhere, they will not exist. [3]

Now then, if before God created heaven and earth there was nothing, where did God place heaven and earth? They certainly could not be placed within nothing, and yet they were created, and those very things are to themselves places, because he who can do all things willed it, even if we are unable to understand in what way those things happened. God himself had regard to this, when desiring to show his Almighty power to Job he said: 'Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof if thou knowest? Or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? Or who hath laid the corner stone thereof?' [4]

And that we may understand that these works of the Almighty power of God are most worthy of all praise, immediately the Lord adds, 'When the

[1] St. John xx. 29; Heb. xi. 1. [2] Heb. vi. 16.
[3] St. Aug. *Ep.* clxxxvii, *c.* 6, no. 18. [4] Job xxxviii. 4.

morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.' [1]

Doubtless, the holy angels who were created at the same time as the heaven and the earth and who are, as it were, most brilliant spiritual stars, and may also be called sons of God, when they saw heaven and earth produced from nothing and placed in nothing and yet most firmly grounded on their own stability, did indeed with immense astonishment and delight praise the omnipotence of the Creator.

And no less is it a depth for the understanding to penetrate, that God by the sole exercise of his will should raise such immense masses, for we know that, in buildings incomparably smaller, how many tools, what machinery, and how many assistants a builder needs.

Who can follow, even in thought, how it can happen that by a single interior will, which goes not forth from him who wills, such immense and various works are produced ?

God said, certainly in regard to himself, for the Word of God is in God and is God himself [2]—he said, I say, that the sovereignty of his will is the same in commanding and in carrying out the command: let the heaven be made, and it was made: let the earth be made, and it was made : let there be light, let there be sun, stars, trees, living creatures, man, angels, and all things were made. Add to this that God could, if he so willed, also destroy all these things and the whole world with one look, as we read in the books of the Maccabees.[3] But this depth is to be added, that God made all these things, so many and so great, and things composed of so many members or parts, in one moment. With us both art and nature need a long space of time in order that the works may be accomplished: we see herbs sown long before they spring up, trees

[1] Job xxxviii. 7. [2] St. John i. 1. [3] 2 Macc. viii. 18.

often requiring many years to take root and spread their branches and bring forth fruit: animals bear their young for a long time and also nourish them for a long time before they grow up: I say nothing about art, since it is well known that our workmen accomplish nothing without taking time and that often a long time.

How great then is the power of God which, swifter than a word, accomplishes the greatest works? I do not discuss the question whether God finished the heaven and earth and all things in them in one moment, or whether he took the whole six days in the first creation of things; for I did not undertake to explain problems, but to make means of ascent to God by the consideration of things. The fact that I adduce and at which I marvel is, that each separate thing was made perfect in a moment by the Almighty Creator. And in the case of earth, water, air, and fire, no one doubts that they were formed at once and in a moment, and also that all the angels were made at the same moment.

Concerning the firmament and the separation of the waters, it is known that all that was done by the sole power of the Word who said, 'Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters'; and that happened in a moment, for it follows 'and it was so.'[1] On which passage Saint John Chrysostom says: 'He spake only, and the work followed: so again he was the Maker, according to those words, "Let the earth bring forth grass and it was so."' Who when he thinks on this will not marvel how the word of the Lord, 'Let the earth bring forth,' adorns the face of the earth with a variety of flowers as with a wonderful robe? Thou seest the earth, which before was shapeless and uncultivated, all at once as if contending with the sky in regard to its glory and adornment. And afterwards on those words

[1] Gen. i. 6.

'Let there be lights,' he thus speaks: 'He spake only, and that wonderful element was produced, I mean the sun. And what if to this thou add that at the same moment and in the same word, the same Creator made the moon and all the stars?' And on those words, 'Let the waters bring forth,' etc., he thus speaks: 'What tongue is sufficient for the praise of the workman? for as concerning the earth he only said, "Let it bring forth," and soon appeared a varied abundance and manifold kinds of flowers and herbs, so also here he said, "Let the waters bring forth," and at once so many kinds of reptiles and birds were created, as could never be enumerated in one discourse.'[1] Therefore, 'Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the mighty ones?'

CHAPTER 5

The soul is admonished to fear God and keep his commandments.

AND now, my soul, thou understandest clearly how great is the power of thy Maker, which stretches to all things by its breadth; by its length endures for ever, and bears all things and rules them without being weary; by its height goes so far as to accomplish what seems to be impossible and what is indeed impossible to every other being, itself excepted; by its depth does those things in such a manner that the method of working surpasses all created intelligence, since from nothing and in nothing, and without instruments and without time, it accomplished them by word and command alone: 'He spake the word and they were made: he commanded and they were created.'[2]

If thou art wise thou canst gather from these facts how much it matters whether thou hast him for an enemy or for a friend, as angered or as pleased: for if

[1] St. Chrys. in *Gen. Hom.* iv–vii. [2] Ps. cxlviii. 5.

thou hast him as an enemy or angered, he is able suddenly to despoil thee of all thy goods and to fill thee with all wretchedness: and there is none that can deliver thee out of his hands, for who will dare to contend with the Almighty? If alone and naked thou meetest an implacable enemy, seeking thee with a sharp sword, what wilt thou do but fall into sweat and become pale and trembling, and louting on thy knees beg his pity! And yet he is but a man, and perchance thou wilt be able to free thyself from death, by flight or by fighting, and snatching the sword from his hands. But with an angry God what wilt thou do, from him thou canst not flee, since he is everywhere, and thou canst not resist him, for he is omnipotent, and thou canst not presume on his delay, since he acts in a moment, and on his sole authority. With reason did the Apostle say, 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.'[1] But if, on the other hand, thou hast God well pleased with thee, and as thy friend, who happier than thou? For he is able to do what he wills, and if he is thy friend, to fill thee with all good things and to deliver thee from all evils.

But so long as thou art in this life, it lies in thine own hands to have God as an angry enemy or a living friend. For God by the prophets, and then by his Son, and by his Apostles in the Holy Scriptures is continually calling, inviting sinners to penitence and the righteous to keep his commandments, that thus he may have both for his friends, or rather as very dear children and heirs of his eternal kingdom. Hear Ezekiel: 'As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?' and further, 'As for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby

[1] Heb. x. 31.

in the day that he turneth from his wickedness.'[1] And what Ezekiel cries, Isaiah and Jeremiah and the rest of the prophets likewise proclaim : for it is the one Spirit in all, and by all he cries the same thing.

Hear the Son of God as he begins his preaching: 'Then Jesus began,' says Saint Matthew, 'to preach and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'[2] Hear the Apostle Paul, speaking of himself and his fellow Apostles in the second Epistle to the Corinthians: 'We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.'[3] What could be plainer, what sweeter? The Apostle beseeches us, in the Name of Christ, that we should desire to be reconciled to God and have him pleased, not angry, with us: who can doubt the mercy of God if a man earnestly turns to him? He will receive all who turn to him, as the most loving father receives the prodigal son.[4] But when we have returned and have accepted his forgiveness, what does he ask of us in order that we may continue to be his friends and children, but that we should keep his commandments? 'If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.'[5] And if perchance thou sayest, without the help of God we cannot keep his commandments, hear Saint Augustine in his explanation of the fifty-sixth Psalm, where, speaking of the most difficult precept of all, that is laying down one's life for the brethren, he says thus: 'God would not command us to do this if he judged it impossible for it to be done by man: and if, thinking on thine own weakness, thou faintest under the command, be comforted in the example: but even the example for thee is a great thing, he who set for thee the example is with thee to furnish aid also.'[6]

[1] Ezek. xxxiii. 11, 12. [2] St. Matt. iv. 17. [3] 2 Cor. v. 20
[4] St. Luke xv. 20. [5] St. Matt. xix. 17.
[6] St. Aug. in *Enarr. in Ps. lvi* (P.B. lvii).

And that 'in the mouth of two witnesses every word may be established,'[1] hear Saint Leo: 'Rightly,' he saith, 'doth God lay down the command, since he goes before with aid.'[2]

Why then fear, O soul? enter safely on the way of the commandment since he goeth before thee, who by the powerful help of his grace maketh the 'crooked straight and the rough places plain.'[3] With this assistance going before thee, the yoke of the Lord is made sweet and his burden light,[4] and the Apostle John cries, 'His commandments are not grievous.'[5] But if they seem grievous to thee, think how much more grievous will be the torment of hell, and thou wilt not dare, except thou be a fool, to wish to experience them.

But think on this and think again and never forget it: now is the time of mercy, thereafter of justice: now there is freedom to sin, afterwards it will be necessary to pay the severest penalty: now it is easy for a man to be reconciled with God, and with the slight labour of penitence to obtain full pardon, and by a brief mourning to avert everlasting wailing: and now by some good work done in the power of love to be able to obtain the kingdom of heaven, when afterwards it will not be possible with all the riches of the world by begging to obtain one drop of cold water.

[1] St. Matt. xviii. 16. [2] *De Pass. Dom.* serm. xvi. [3] Isa. xl. 4. [4] St. Matt. xi. 30. [5] 1 St. John v. 3.

TWELFTH STEP

CONSIDERATION OF THE GREATNESS OF THE WISDOM OF GOD BY THE LIKENESS OF CORPOREAL MAGNITUDE

Chapter I

The breadth of the Wisdom of God consists in the perfect knowledge of all things.

HOW truly the Apostle wrote at the end of his Epistle to the Romans, that God is alone wise,[1] we may easily understand, if we will consider carefully the breadth, the length, the height, and depth of the wisdom of God.

And to begin with the breadth. The wisdom of God is described as very wide, because God knows distinctly and perfectly all things that are in nature, from the first angel to the last worm; not only does he know their whole substance, but also their parts, properties, powers, qualities, actions. Hence those words, 'Thou numberest my steps,'[2] and, 'The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings.'[3] And if he numbers and considers each step, how much more the actions of the mind, good or bad. And if God reckoneth the hairs of our head, according to the Word of the Lord, 'The hairs of your head are all numbered,'[4] how much more doth he know all the members of the body and all the powers of the soul. And if he knows the number of

[1] Rom. xvi. 27. [2] Job xiv. 16. [3] Prov. v. 21.
[4] St. Matt. x. 30.

the sands of the sea and the drops of rain, as we gather from the Wise Man,[1] how much more may we believe that he knows the number of the stars and of the angels. And if all the idle words of all men are to be brought into judgement, as the Lord himself declares,[2] certainly his ears will at once hear all the voices of all men, and not only the voices of the body, but also of the mind, that is, the thoughts and desires. How great then, and how boundless, is this breadth of wisdom which comprehends at once all things that are, that have been, that will be, and that can be.

And this divine mind is not worn out by such a variety of separate and inferior things, as the foolish wisdom of some philosophers would have it. Perchance we might imagine this, if God had to obtain knowledge from things as we do: but since he sees all things in his own being, there is no danger of wearing out: although the acquiring of knowledge by seeking after it, which is the method of mankind, is far more noble than the entire lack of knowledge which is the portion of brutes, in the same way as it is more excellent to be blind, in the way animals are, than not being blind, to be unable to see, as stones: and other members of the body are not more worthy of honour than the eyes because they can not be blind, but the eyes although they can be blind, are more worthy of honour since they have the faculty of seeing, as Saint Augustine rightly argues in his books on the *City of God*.[3]

Hence, my soul, thou oughtest at every time and in every place to be careful what thou doest, what thou sayest, what thou thinkest, since thou dost never act, speak, or think without God seeing, hearing, observing thee: for if thou wouldst not dare to do or say anything evil though urged thereto by the strongest desire, if thou thoughtest that thou wert heard or seen

[1] Ecclus. i. 2. [2] St. Matt. xii. 36. [3] St. Aug., *de Civ.*, xii, *c.* 1.

by man, how darest thou think those things with an angry God looking upon thee ?

'Be it so,' saith Saint Augustine in his rule for nuns, 'that what you do is seen by no man, it is beheld by him who looketh from above, and from him nothing can be hid.' [1]

And Saint Basil, in his book on virginity, addressing a virgin shut up alone in her cell, warns her to reverence her Bridegroom present everywhere, and his Father and the Holy Spirit and the countless multitudes of angels, and with them the holy spirits of the Fathers : 'For there is no one of them,' he says, 'who does not see all things in every place.' [2]

O thou blessed soul of mine, if thou considerest always that thou art continually in view of this assembly, even in the darkness and silence of midnight : what a perfect life wilt thou spend, how carefully wilt thou avoid all levity and wandering abroad.

This is indeed the word which the Lord spake once to the patriarch Abraham, 'Walk before me and be thou perfect';[3] that is, bethink thee that thou art always seen by me, and without any doubt thou wilt be perfect.

CHAPTER 2

The length of the Wisdom of God is displayed in the knowledge of things to come.

THE length of wisdom appears in knowledge of future events : for God so clearly sees, that from eternity itself he saw what will happen in the last days and beyond, even in eternity, and indeed nothing greater than this length can be thought of.

'Thou understandest my thoughts long before,' said David in the Psalms ; and a little after, 'There is not

[1] St. Aug. *Ep.* ccxi, no. 10. [2] St. Basil, *de Virg.*, *c.* 7.
[3] Gen. xvii. 1.

a word in my tongue but thou, O Lord, knowest it altogether';[1] that is, all things future, and all things past. The books of the prophets are full of the clearest and truest predictions, which were not spoken by themselves, but, as sings Zacharias, 'God spake by the mouth of his holy prophets which have been since the world began.'[2]

And this foresight and prediction is proper to God alone, as God himself says by Isaiah, 'Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods.'[3] And that from the many we may consider the few, Isaiah thus speaks, 'Thus saith the Lord to his Anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him, etc.,'[4] where the Persian monarchy is foretold and Cyrus the first king of the Persians is called by his own name, and the reason is added why God willed to exalt Cyrus, namely, because it was he who should loose the Babylonian captivity: and all these things were fulfilled about two hundred years later. And by the similitude of an immense image whose 'head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his feet part of iron and part of clay,'[5] Daniel clearly foretold four kingdoms, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, and in the time of the last monarchy, the kingdom of Christ, that is, the Christian Church, greater than all the other kingdoms: and next he so plainly describes the wars of the successors of Alexander the Great[6] that certain unbelievers have suspected that those descriptions were written after the wars were ended.

And, setting aside all the rest, Saint Luke tells how Christ himself bewailed the overthrow of Jerusalem, which was to happen after many years, and he so

[1] Ps. cxxxix. 3. Vulg.: 'omni novissima et antiqua.'
[2] St. Luke i. 70. [3] Isa. xli. 23. [4] ibid., xlv. 1.
[5] Dan. ii. 31. [6] ibid., xi. 5.

distinctly describes everything in detail as if he were telling, not of future, but of past, events.

I omit numberless other prophecies, of which, as I said, the books of the prophets are full.

Next are the astrologers and certain other diviners, who as though desirous of being imitators of God, are altogether ridiculous: for it cannot be that they predict the truth concerning future events, unless perchance now and again they happen to get near the truth. For, since in all causes and happenings the will of God presides and rules, and can hinder the lesser causes when it wills, no one can foretell the truth unless God hath willed to manifest his will to him, as he often manifested it to his prophets.

And so this is true that demons desired to be considered gods specially because they established oracles and foretold future events, as Saint Augustine testifies in his books on the *City of God*. And the same celebrated doctor of the Church in his book on the divining of demons openly shows their divination to be false, as their divinity is false: for they declare nothing plainly but that which they themselves are about to do; or what has already taken place, they by their natural swiftness represent to those at a distance as about to take place; or again, that which from daily experience they consider will take place, as mariners foretell many things of the winds, husbandmen of the weather, physicians of diseases; and when the devils are asked about things to come which they know not, they make answer in ambiguous words or in equivocation, and when those things prove false, they lay the fault on their interpreters or soothsayers.[1]

Therefore our Lord only, 'Whose wisdom is infinite,'[2] founded true oracles, and foretelleth the truth in all things which shall come to pass both by happenings and by choice.

[1] St. Aug., *de Divinit. Daemonum*, *c.* 3, no. 7. [2] Ps. cxlvii. 5.

CHAPTER 3

Of the manifold height of the Wisdom of God.

GOD'S wisdom is most high and far surpasses the wisdom of men or of angels. The height of wisdom is discerned by nobility of the object, of its power, of its form, and of its action.

The object of divine wisdom both natural and proportionate is the divine Essence itself which is so high that it has no proportion to any understanding either angelic or human: and angels of the highest order cannot ascend to see God unless they are lifted up by the light of glory: and this is the reason why in holy writ God is said to be invisible: 'To the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God,' saith the Apostle in his former Epistle to Timothy,[1] and he afterwards adds: that God dwelleth in light that cannot be approached.[2]

Then secondly, power, which in us is an accident, is in God a divine substance, and therefore exists in him in a much higher and nobler degree than in us. The form also is the higher the more it doth represent: and therefore those angels that have fewer and more universal forms are said to have so much the higher knowledge.

How great then is the height of divine wisdom, which has no form but its own Essence, which is but one, and is sufficient of itself alone for God to represent and to know himself and all things which are made, shall be made, or may be made.

And in the last place, that wisdom is accounted most sublime which knoweth most by fewest acts: but God by one single act of intuition perfectly knoweth himself and all other things.

The wisdom of God therefore hath the pre-eminence and ought to be called most high.

[1] 1 Tim. i. 17. [2] ibid., vi. 16.

Lift up thine eyes now, O my soul, and see how vast a distance there is between thy knowledge and that of thy Maker. For thou by many acts in running hither and thither canst hardly know any one thing perfectly, but thy Maker doth by one only act most clearly and distinctly see himself and all others. And yet thou thyself, now lying in darkness, mayst, if thou wilt, ascend so high upon the wings of faith and love that after laying down this mortal body, being changed from glory to glory, thou mayst, in the light of God, see God who is light.[1] And being make like unto God, thou also at one beholding and that lasting for ever, shalt be able to see God in himself and thyself and all creatures in God. 'For what is there that he doth not see,' saith Saint Gregory, 'who seeth him that seeth all things? How great then shall be that pleasure, that glory, that plenty of all things, when thou art admitted to that inaccessible light and art a partaker in all the good things of thy Lord.'[2] The Queen of Sheba, when she heard of the wisdom of Solomon and saw the wonderful order of the servants of his house, was so astonished that, as the Scripture saith, 'There was no more spirit in her,' and she said, 'Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom.'[3] And what proportion is there between the wisdom of Solomon and the wisdom of God, who is the only wise, yea Wisdom itself? And what is the order of his servants compared with the nine orders of angels of God of whom 'Thousand thousands ministered unto him and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him'?[4]

Surely if thou couldst taste of these things even in a small measure, thou wouldst most willingly do or suffer anything that thou mightest obtain the favour

[1] Ps. xxxvi. 9; 2 Cor. iii. 18. [2] *Dial.* iv. 33. [3] 1 Kings x. [4] Dan. vii. 10.

of God. Therefore in the meantime 'humble thyself under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt thee in the day of visitation';[1] subject thine understanding to faith, that thou mayst be exalted to vision; subject thy will to obey the commandments that thou mayst be exalted 'into the glorious liberty of the children of God';[2] humble thy flesh also to patience and labour, that God may glorify it and exalt it to eternal rest.

CHAPTER 4

The depth of the Wisdom of God is manifest in the knowledge of our thoughts and especially of what is to come.

IT remains for us to consider the depth of the divine wisdom, which consists chiefly in the discerning of the reins and the heart, that is, in the knowledge of men's thoughts and desires, especially those which are to come. For we read, 'Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh upon the heart';[3] 'Thou alone knowest the hearts of the children of men';[4] 'Thou understandest my thoughts';[5] 'He knoweth the hidden things of the heart';[6] and 'The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked,' where the Septuagint translates, 'the heart of man is deep and unscrutable,' and Saint Jerome expounding this passage, rightly shows that Christ is truly God because he saw the thoughts of men, which God alone can see;[7] 'And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?';[8] 'But he knew their thoughts';[9] 'Why reason ye these things in your hearts?'[10] Therefore every thought and desire of men, although present and really existing, is so deep that neither angels nor demons nor men can search or

[1] 1 St. Pet. v. 6. [2] Rom. viii. 21. [3] 1 Sam. xvi. 7.
[4] 2 Chron. vi. 30. [5] Ps. cxxxix. 2. [6] Ps. xliv. 21. [7] *Com.* Jer. L.
[8] St. Matt. ix. 4. [9] St. Luke vi. 8. [10] St. Mark ii. 8.

penetrate into it, but far deeper is the thought or desire of things to come: for not only are men and angels not able to penetrate it, but they cannot penetrate the way by which God, who alone knows it, cometh to the knowledge thereof. And this David seems to wish to signify when he says, 'Such knowledge is too wonderful and excellent for me.'[1] For that *ex me* signifies in Hebrew phrase, 'before me' or 'over me,' and the sense is 'Thy knowledge is more wonderful than I am able to understand how it exists.' For he adds, 'It is high and great and I cannot attain unto it,' that is, it is raised above my knowledge, and I cannot by any reasoning reach up to understand it. But he speaks of the knowledge of future thoughts: for he had said, 'Thou knowest my thoughts long before': of the foreknowledge of these thoughts and ways he says, 'I cannot attain unto it.' It may perchance be answered that God sees those future thoughts in his eternity, to which all things are present, or in the predetermination of his will: but if it were so, such knowledge would not be wonderful, for we ourselves are easily able to know what we are about to do, or what things are before our eyes. But the Scripture saith that God searcheth the reins and the heart and that there he sees what man desires and thinks or what afterwards he will desire and think. But this is exceeding wonderful, that God by searching the hearts and reins sees what is not yet in being there, and what depends on the choice of the will whether it ever shall be. Therefore as it pertains to the depth of the power of God to make something out of nothing, and to call those things that are not, but shall be, as the things which are, so it belongs to the depth of the divine wisdom that by searching out the reins and the heart, to see what is not yet there and as if it already were, and which doubtless will exist.

[1] Vulg.: 'Mirabilis facta est scientia tua ex me.'

CHAPTER 5

Elevation of the soul to the divine Physician who searcheth the heart and healeth it.

BUT since I undertook not to dispute questions but to stir the soul to rise up to God, rouse up thyself, my soul, and mount above thyself, as Jeremiah advises, 'Let us lift up our heart unto God in the heavens,'[1] and consider that profound abyss of the divine wisdom which searches the depth of the heart and sees many things which the heart cannot see. O blessed Peter, when thou didst say to thy Lord, 'Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee,'[2] surely thou didst not speak with a double heart, but with sincerity and uprightness, nor didst thou see the infirmity of thy heart which thy Lord saw in it when he said, 'Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice':[3] for that most skilful Physician saw the weakness in thine heart which thou sawest not, and that was true, and the Physician foretold not what the sick man boasted of. But give thanks to the Physician who, as he foresaw and foretold the disease, breathed into thy soul from above the powerful medicine of repentance and quickly cured it.

O good, O kind, O most wise and powerful Physician, cleanse me from my secret faults.[4] How many are there which I do not bewail nor wash away with tears because I do not see them. Let thy grace be ever present with me, by which thou searchest the reins and the hearts, and do thou discover to me the evil desires and evil deeds which I do not see, but which thou seest, and looking mercifully upon me, open such a fountain of tears that while there is time, they may be cleansed and washed away by thy grace. Amen.

[1] Lam. iii. 41. [2] St. Matt. xxvi. 35. [3] St. Mark xiv. 30. [4] Ps. xix. 13.

THIRTEENTH STEP

CONSIDERATION OF GOD'S PRACTICAL WISDOM

Chapter I

The breadth of God's practical wisdom is clear from the creation of things and their disposal in number, measure, and weight.

WE have considered the wisdom of God as it is in theory: his practical wisdom is now to be considered, which we may also call his effective wisdom. This wisdom has its breadth, length, height, and depth: the breadth is known by creation, the length by the preservation of things created, the height by the work of redemption, the depth by providence and predestination.

And to begin with creation. 'God hath made all things in wisdom,' as it is said in the Psalms,[1] and poured it forth over all his works, as the Wise Man writes.[2] As we therefore know the power of the worker in the creation of all things out of nothing, so by the wonderful workmanship which we discern in every one of them do we admire the wisdom of the Creator: for 'He hath disposed all things in measure, number, and weight.'[3] With this savour God hath seasoned all things and by this savour we come to understand how delightful is his wisdom, how amiable and how desirable.

All created things, then, have a certain number, a

[1] Ps. civ. 24. [2] Ecclus. i. 10. [3] Wisd. xi. 20.

certain measure, a certain weight both to distinguish them from God, who hath no measure because he is immense, nor number, because he is One and simple in his Essence; nor weight, because his value and his price surpass all price and value: and also since they are all good and beautiful, as Moses most truly said, 'God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good.'[1] All created things, then, have the measure which is necessary to attain the end for which they were made: nor can anything be added to or taken from that measure without making the thing deformed and useless, and therefore not so good as it was: 'God hath made everything beautiful in his season.'[2] Therefore to the heavens God gave a very spacious measure, since they have to embrace all things beneath them; to the air, far shorter measure than the heaven, but greater than to the earth and waters which form one globe and are enclosed on all sides by the air. He gave to the elephant a body of huge bulk that it might carry very heavy weights and even a tower full of men: to the horse less, because it was made to carry only one rider; he made birds small that they might build their nests on branches of trees; bees and ants very small, that they might hide themselves in the holes either of hives or in the earth.

The same thing we may say of number. God made one sun, since one was enough to lighten the whole earth and to make day by his brightness: he also made one moon, since one is enough to give light in the night: he willed that there should be many stars, that in the absence of sun and moon, as happens at their conjunction, they might in some measure disperse the darkness of night. And not only to all things in general did he assign the fitting number, but also established the number of parts in each separate thing, that no addition or diminution can be

[1] Gen. i. 31. [2] Eccles. iii. 11.

made. God hath given man two eyes, two ears, two hands, two feet, one nose, one mouth, one breast, one head, and thus he appears a very beautiful and comely creature: invert the order, put on any man one eye, two noses, one ear, two mouths, one hand, and one foot, two hearts and two heads, and nothing more useless or more hideous could be made.

Lastly, God hath given to each thing weight, that is, he has given to each thing the value that its nature requires. By the word weight or price we understand the qualities which make things good and precious, and there are three things necessary to perfection: number, that nothing be wanting; secondly a proper proportion of parts; and lastly, internal and external qualities, as loveliness of colour in the outward surface of the body, and inward power which is useful or necessary for our various actions. But indeed it is wonderful to consider what virtue God gave to each thing, however tiny and small, so that it would seem he willed to show his power in great things, and in small his wisdom. Who can conceive what virtue there is in a grain of mustard seed, which is so very small that it can scarce be discerned by the eye and yet it produces a large tree, so that even birds lodge in its branches, as he who is truth itself says in the Gospel.[1] And this is not peculiar to mustard seed, but is common to all seeds in the virtue of which lie hid roots, trunks, branches, leaves, blossoms, and fruit of the greatest trees. Indeed if we had not learnt this by experience we should not easily persuade men that from so small a seed so many and such different things could ever spring. And who could conceive that in an ant, a fly, a flea, and such very tiny creatures, there should be nimble feet, a head, a heart, exterior and interior senses, and that in their own way, although as yet imperfect, they possess wisdom and judgement? And lastly, who would suppose that

[1] St. Matt. xiii. 31.

in these and other very small creatures there should be power to pierce and enter the living flesh, so that not only do they become most troublesome to men, but also to elephants and lions which they terrify ?

Great, therefore, is the Lord, and great is his wisdom as well in the smallest as in the greatest things. Galen, that prince of physicians, though a heathen, admired the divine artifice when he perceived it in the human hand, and cried out in praise of the Creator. What then, O Christian, oughtest thou to do, who art assured that not only the bodies of men and other creatures but also the heavens, the stars, the angels, and the immortal spirits were made with incredible wisdom by the same most wise Creator ?

Chapter 2

The length of the practical wisdom of God manifest in the preservation of things.

Now the length of the practical wisdom of God appears in the preservation of things; as we have already said, its breadth is shown in their creation. Therefore the great and admirable wisdom of God is seen in his preservation of created things and giving them power to continue, and especially such as are of a corruptible nature. And first, if a man considers how God nourishes herbs, plants, living creatures, and the very bodies of men, and makes them thrive and grow so that they are preserved for a long time, he cannot sufficiently wonder at the wisdom of God. For with earth and water he nourishes plants and herbs and causes that the nourishment passes from the root to the trunk, and from the trunk to the branches and fruits by a certain force drawing it upwards and making it run into every part in a wonderful order and measure. Men likewise, and some beasts, he nourishes by herbs and fruits, and so orders that the nourishment enters

drugs that they may be taken by the sick man not only easily but with pleasure, for meats are certainly physic, which unless mortal men frequently take, they cannot escape death. But God, our most loving and wise physician, first gives a savour to the food, that it may be eaten with pleasure; next he varies it in numberless ways so as to remove distaste; and lastly by various changes in the mouth, stomach, liver, and heart the meat is changed into a juice, so thin and subtile that, without cutting out a way and giving pain, it passes through all the arteries and veins and pores of the body and into all parts of the flesh, bones, and nerves when we do not perceive it, and even when we are asleep. Philosophers wonder at this skill and art of nature when they examine it, but what cunning can there be in inanimate things void of sense and skill in reasoning? It is therefore not natural skill but the wisdom of the Creator that is to be admired, for he not only made nature, but found out a way by which these wonders might be done. Hear the wisdom of God speaking in the Gospel: 'Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow, they toil not, neither do they spin . . . and God clothes them.'[1] It is therefore not natural skill, but God, who makes the lilies grow, and clothes them with beauty as with a garment; and the same may be said of the nourishment and increase of all things living, as the Apostle bears witness, when he says, 'Neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.'[2]

And if the wisdom of God feeds, nourishes, and preserves in mortal life plants and animals in so wonderful a way, think, if thou canst, O my soul, how God doth feed the minds of angels and of men in life which

[1] St. Matt. vi. 28. [2] 1 Cor. iii. 7.

thoroughly understand what this is : ' God shall be all in all ';[1] what, I say, when God the highest and infinite good shall be to all the saints food and clothing and life and all things: surely thou wouldst loathe all things present and only mind and seek the things that are above. But let us proceed to the rest.

It is also almost like a miracle that for the preservation and continuance of man's life God hath given to the smallest things continual motion which, though lasting long, yet causes no fatigue. Men take great pains to make a clock in which the wheels by force of weights turn twenty-four hours without stopping. With what great wisdom, then, does God act, who causes the nourishing faculty to act also continually and without stopping so long as plants and animals live, and also that lungs and arteries should move continually for seventy years or more. For of necessity the nourishing faculty must work, and the heart and arteries be in movement from the beginning of life to the end. And so in those who reach eighty and ninety years, it is necessary that their hearts and arteries should be moving all that time. And before the Flood, when men lived to nine hundred years, it was necessary that the heart and arteries, things fragile and delicate, should work continuously without any pause or rest for nine hundred years. Truly those who do not wonder at these things and do not in them perceive and adore the divine wisdom, must be altogether deprived of the light of wisdom.

To this we may add, thirdly, that the wisdom of God, although it can, without any labour of men or other animals, and even without the service of the sun and

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 28.

other secondary causes, both produce and preserve herbs and trees, so that all living things may have their proper food: yet he willed to use the service of secondary causes and by the labour and industry of men and beasts, that no one might be idle, but that every one should exercise their strength. And he willed also that, among men, some should be rich and some poor, that all might have opportunity for cultivating virtue and might be united in the bond of charity. For the rich may exercise liberality and mercy, the poor patience and humility. The rich need the labour of the poor to till their fields, to feed their cattle, by divers trades to prepare the things which are necessary for all. The poor again need the help of the rich to give them money and tools with which they may provide for themselves food and clothing and other necessaries. And there is no reason why the poor should complain of the divine wisdom: for God, who knows all and loves every one, gives to each what will bring him to everlasting life, foresees what will be useful; just as earthly physicians order fasting for some persons and cause them to be bled, and to others they order meat and wine and bid them enjoy themselves that they may recover health. Doubtless very many poor folks attain eternal salvation, who if they had been rich would have perished eternally, and although the rich may be saved if they seek to be rich in good works and give that willingly which they received from our common Lord, not to store but to bestow, yet it cannot be denied that poverty is a safer, smoother, and quicker way to heaven than wealth. Our divine Master doth not deceive us. He saith, 'Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven';[1] and again, 'Blessed be ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God,' and 'Woe to you that are rich, for ye have received your consolation':[2]

[1] St. Matt. xix. 23. [2] St. Luke vi. 20, 24.

nor does the Apostle deceive us when he says in his former Epistle to Timothy, 'They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdiction';[1] and what the Lord and his Apostles taught by word the same they confirmed by example, for the Lord said of himself, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head,'[2] and the Apostle says of himself and his fellow Apostle, 'Unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst and have no certain dwelling-place,'[3] that is, we have no home of our own. And it cannot be doubted that the wisdom of God and the sons and disciples of wisdom made choice of the smoothest and safest road to life. But because 'the number of fools is infinite'[4] few choose the way of their own accord, but many turn aside from it with their whole affection and strength.

Lastly, the length of the divine wisdom is seen in that, as it is itself eternal, so it hath implanted in all things a most vigorous instinct to preserve themselves, to prolong their life and being as far as they can. We see men, when they perceive that their lives are in danger, moving all things, sparing no cost or pains to preserve them; we see creatures of all kinds struggle beyond their strength with stronger, lest they should lose their life; we see a candle when burning and near going out bestirring itself twice or thrice and putting forth a great flame, so that it seems to be striving as much as it can not to go out. We see drops of water hanging some time upon wood or stone, becoming globes and holding together as long as they can lest they should fall down and perish. We see heavy things ascending contrary to nature and light things unnaturally fall that there may be no vacuum, lest

[1] 1 Tim. vi. 9. [2] St. Luke ix. 58. [3] 1 Cor. iv. 11.
[4] Eccles. i. 15, Vulg.

they, being apart from other things, should not be preserved.

But it is yet more wonderful how for the propagation of the species God has endowed parents with so strong and almost inconceivable affection for their young. We see a hen, weakened by bringing up her chickens, although weak and feeble, fight bravely against kites and dogs and foxes: and how many troubles and labours women gladly bear in bringing forth and rearing their children, everybody knows. The cause of this is the counsel of the divine wisdom who to keep up this propagation as a shadow of his eternity hath ingrafted in all animals, even in brutes and wild beasts, a very strong love for their young. For as there are many animals for whose destruction men lie in wait, either for their own profit, such as hares, bulls, deer, thrushes, quails, partridges, almost all fishes; or lest they should do harm, as wolves, foxes, serpents, and numberless other such creatures: many kinds of animals would have perished long since had not the wisdom of God, by this very affection, provided for their preservation and propagation. But if a natural love for this life so short and full of trouble exists in all living things, what should be our love for the blessed and eternal life? O blindness and folly of man! All things strive even beyond their strength to preserve this very short life, a mere shadow of eternity; and man, endowed with reason, will not work for the true eternity of a most happy life, I do not say beyond, but even according to his strength. All things by natural instinct fear temporal death and shun it beyond all evils; man, endued with reason and taught by divine faith, neither stands in fear of everlasting death nor spurns it, at least not as he is accustomed to fear and shun the evils of this temporary life. And so truly did the Preacher say, 'The number of fools is infinite': [1]

[1] Eccles. i. 15, Vulg.

and truly did he who is the Truth say in the Gospel, 'Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.' [1]

CHAPTER 3

That the height of the practical wisdom of God is perceived in the work of Redemption.

Now the height of the practical wisdom of God is seen in the work of our redemption; says Saint Augustine, 'I was not sated in those days with the wondrous sweetness of considering the depth of thy counsels concerning the salvation of mankind.' [2]

It was surely a most high counsel by the shame of the Cross to repair all the damage which the craft of the devil had caused through the sin of the first man, and so to repair it that the work repaired should become more beautiful than it was before it needed restoration. Four evils sprang from the sin of the first man: an affront to God by the pride and disobedience of Adam; the punishment of the first man and of all the human race by the loss of the grace of God and of eternal happiness; the sorrow of the angels who were greatly saddened by the injury done to God and the misery fallen upon man; the triumph of the devil and all the evil spirits who rejoiced over man overcome and cast down by them. All these evils the wisdom of God bore away and turned to greater good by the mystery of the Cross, so that not without cause does the Church sing, 'O happy fault which had such a Redeemer.' [3]

For if a tailor by his own industry and the addition of some ornament could so amend a garment old and precious, but cut and torn by some accident, that it became more beautiful and precious than before, it

[1] St. Matt. vii. 14. [2] *Conf.* ix. 6.
[3] Benediction of the Paschal Candle: *Exultet.*

might truly be called a fortunate rent, which gave occasion to such mending. The first man waxed proud by the craft and subtlety of the devil, sought to be like God, disobeyed him and transgressed his commandments, so in some way he took to himself the honour due to God. But Christ, the Second Adam, who is the wisdom of God, 'Humbled himself and became obedient unto death,'[1] and restored to God honour much greater than that which the first Adam by pride and disobedience had taken away. For Adam was a mere man, and if he had obeyed God he would have obeyed him in a very slight matter. For what great matter would it have been for our first parents to abstain from the fruit of the forbidden tree when they had plenty of others better? Therefore the sin was indeed the greater and so much the more serious as the obedience would have been easy and have involved no labour. But Christ was God and Man and humbled himself to obey God his Father in a thing most hard and laborious, to wit in the death of the Cross, which was full of sorrow and shame. Wherefore, if we consider the eminence of the Person and the depth of humility and obedience, nothing can be imagined greater or more meritorious or more honouring to God than that humble obedience of Christ. Therefore our Lord said very truly in the Gospel, 'I have glorified thee on the earth,'[2] for indeed Christ Jesus glorified God the Father with an unspeakable glory before the angels of God and before all the holy spirits of the prophets and others to whom those things were made known. And if the angels sang together at the birth of Christ for the humility of the manger, 'Glory to God in the highest,'[3] much more did they sing the same song with greater joy for the humility of the Cross.

Moreover, man himself, if he had not sinned, would

[1] Phil. ii. 8. [2] St. John xvii. 4. [3] St. Luke ii. 14.

have reached only to an equality with the angels, but now by the redemption which is in Christ Jesus mankind hath obtained that one Man, exalted above all the angels, should sit on the Right Hand of God and become the head and Lord both of angels and of men ; for concerning Christ the Apostle Peter thus writes in his former Epistle, 'He is gone into heaven and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him';[1] and his fellow Apostle Paul to the Philippians, 'Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.'[2] Therefore the Son glorified the Father by the humility of the Passion after an unspeakable measure, and the Father also after an unspeakable manner hath glorified the Son by exalting him to his Right Hand, which glorification hath so affected the whole human race, that they are indeed ungrateful who do not recognize the immense benefit and who do not give God thanks. Because not only is Christ God and Man, but his Mother, who nevertheless is human only and not God, was exalted above all the choirs of angels ; wherefore as they are possessed of so great an increase of the glory which they would not have possessed had not man sinned, men may rightly say, 'O happy fault which deserved to have such a Redeemer!'

Moreover, the holy angels, as they were saddened by the fall of the first man, the sore disgrace of their younger brother, so did they exceedingly rejoice over the full redemption wrought by Christ. For if there be joy in heaven among the angels in heaven over one sinner that repenteth,[3] how much more may we believe that there was very great rejoicing in the presence of those same angels that, in behalf of mankind, Christ

[1] 1 St. Pet. iii. 22. [2] Phil. ii. 9. [3] St. Luke xv. 7.

as Man had fully satisfied the justice of God and that by the key of his Cross the kingdom of heaven was opened to all believers. Nor is it to be supposed that the holy angels took it ill that God raised the Man Christ and the most blessed Virgin above them ; for there is no envy in the angels, but they are full of the truest and most burning love; and charity envieth not, is not puffed up, is not saddened on account of another's good, but rejoiceth and exulteth together with all good men when any good befalls them, as much as if it were their own. And so the Church truly sings, 'Mary is taken up into heaven, the angels rejoice.'[1] It does not say the angels are sad, but, the angels rejoice, because they see the Virgin Mother of God raised above the choirs of angels to the heavenly kingdom. The angels know that God hath done it most justly, who doeth all things in perfect wisdom and justice, and their will is so inseparably united to the will of God by the bond of love, that what pleases God pleases them also, and can never displease them. But the devil, who rejoiced for a time because he had overcome and cast down the first man, became afterwards more sorrowful over the victory of Christ than he was joyful before. For from that victory of Christ it came to pass that not only men, as was Adam, but even women and children insult the devil and triumph over him. For it would not have been a disgrace to the devil to be conquered by Adam in Paradise when he had no ignorance nor weakness but was armed with original righteousness, which so subdued to reason the lower part of his nature that it could not rebel, unless the mind itself first rebelled against God. But for the devil now to be overcome by a mortal man, a pilgrim subject to ignorance and concupiscence, is a very great disgrace ; and yet he is overcome by the grace of Christ, and so overcome that many display trophies of chastity, patience, humility,

[1] Office Assumption B.V.M.

charity, although the devil eagerly and constantly casts his fiery darts of temptation and persecution. And in this matter the height of the divine wisdom is specially to be admired. For God saw struggle to be necessary for the human race in order that man should escape worldly honours and the like, which are the snares of the devil and draw such as are led captive to destruction and perdition. What, therefore, did he determine in order that those things should become distasteful to man and that the contrary, purity, poverty, humility, patience, and contempt of the world, should be delightful? He himself came down from heaven and, taking the form of a servant, made this bitter medicine, which was necessary to the sick man, so sweet and pleasant by his example, that many men now love fasting more than feasting, poverty more than riches, virginity more than wedlock, martyrdom more than daintiness, to obey than to command, to be despised than to be honoured, to be governed than to rule, to be humbled than to be exalted. For who, seeing God in human form, full of wisdom and grace, and who can neither deceive nor be deceived, poor, lowly, patient, and pure, and what is more wonderful, for the redemption of mankind nailed to the Cross, and willingly shedding his precious Blood, dying of most ardent charity, who, I say, would not be encouraged and incited to imitate him? This was a wonderful and high contrivance of God's wisdom, of which Isaiah sings, 'Declare his doings among the people.' [1] But even to this day this most high wisdom of God seems to be foolishness, not only to the wise of this world' [2] as saith the Apostle in the former Epistle to the Corinthians, but also to the carnal and sensual men who believe in Christ, but refuse to follow his steps, whom the same Apostle called the enemies of the Cross of Christ. [3]

But thou, O my soul, do thy diligence to suck honey

[1] Isa. xii. 4. [2] 1 Cor. ii. 14. [3] Phil. iii. 18.

out of the rock and oil out of the flinty stone, that is, wisdom out of the folly of the Cross. Consider attentively and carefully who he is who hangs on the Rood and why he so hangs: and when thou hast found that it is indeed he who sitteth above the cherubim,[1] yea, indeed, who sitteth on the right hand of the Majesty on high,[2] thou wilt easily understand that he does not hang there for his own offences, nor because of his weakness or the power of others, but willingly, through his most ardent desire to satisfy the divine justice for the sins of all the world, for the honour and glory of God the Father, for the eternal salvation of the elect, and, as the Apostle speaks, ' that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle '; [3] and lastly for thy sake, because he loved thee and gave himself ' an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.' [4] When, I say, thou shalt have learnt this to be most true, let love rise from the bottom of thy heart to such a benefactor, and seek to imitate him, begin eagerly to thirst after the glory of God, the salvation of all mankind, but especially for the beauty and glory of the whole Church and thine own eternal salvation. Begin to long for a perfect hatred of sin, for purity of heart and perfect righteousness, that at length thou mayst also desire to share in the Cross of thy Lord and to glory in tribulation and afflictions, that hereafter thou mayst also be partaker of his resurrection glory, and not with the wicked to punishment.

CHAPTER 4

The depth of the practical wisdom of God consists in providence and predestination and the judgements of God.

THERE remains the depth of practical wisdom which consists in the providence and predestination and in the

[1] Ps. xcix. 1. [2] Heb. i. 3. [3] Eph. v. 27. [4] ibid., v. 2

judgements of God: for it is written, 'Thy judgements are like the great deep.' [1]

First, then, the providence of God is exceeding wonderful, because it governs all created things immediately, and directs them to their end. 'He careth for all alike'; [2] that is, God cares for all without exception, so that no sparrow falls to the ground without the providence of God, as the Saviour saith. [3] He that can count the multitude of things which are in the whole universe, the same may in some measure guess at the greatness of the wisdom of God, ruling and directing all things in general and particular. Indeed one chief Pastor might rule the whole Christian world by a general providence, but not by particular, which comprehends every Christian, and therefore many bishops are called to the charge: and one may rule many provinces by a general providence, but not by particular, which concerns every citizen, and therefore he employs viceroys or deputies or presidents. But God takes care of every one as of all, and of all as of such. 'A sparrow shall not fall on the ground without your Father. The very hairs of your head are all numbered'; [4] and lest even one should perish, his providence is always watching over us. The young of the ravens forsaken by their parents are not forsaken by God.[5] How safely, therefore, mayst thou rest, my soul, in the bosom of such a Father, even in the midst of darkness, among the mouths of lions and dragons, among numberless legions of spirits; cleave only to him in true love, holy fear, with certain hope, assured faith, undoubting.

But not only doth the providence of God care for each singular and present thing, but it reaches from one end to the other, ordering all things sweetly.[6]

[1] Ps. xxxvi. 6.
[2] Wisd. vi. 7.
[3] St. Luke xii. 6.
[4] St. Matt. x. 29.
[5] Ps. cxlvii. 9.
[6] Wisd. viii. 1.

Therefore God is called the King of ages,[1] because he himself established the order of the ages and disposed the succession of kingdoms and the vicissitudes of times and changes from all eternity. To God nothing new, nothing unforeseen, nothing unthought of can happen. 'The thoughts of mortal men are miserable and our devices are but uncertain,'[2] but God knows all things to come as certainly as things past and present, and disposed in his own mind before the foundation of the world the order and succession of all things. Therefore our holy Mother Church sings publicly and securely that God's providence erreth not in the order and disposition of thought.[3]

But because the reason of divine providence is entirely hidden and his 'judgements like the great deep,'[4] it comes to pass that some, seeing that very many evils are committed among men and left unpunished, rush into the mistake of believing either that human affairs are not governed by the providence of God, or that all those evil things are done by the will of God; both of which opinions are wicked, but the latter is worse than the former, as Saint Augustine writes.[5]

But what misleads men into the greatest of errors is their seeing one part of the divine providence and not discerning another part, whereas they ought to wait for the issue of things which will be manifest to all in the last judgement; they venture rashly to judge before the time, and are greatly deceived. Therefore the Apostle cries in the former Epistle to the Corinthians, 'Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.'[6] Saint Augustine illustrates this matter with

[1] 1 Tim. i. 17. Vulg.: 'regi autem seculorum.' [2] Wisd. ix. 14.
[3] Hymns *Rector potens* and *Rerum Deus tenax vigor*: Brev. Rom. for sixth and ninth hours.
[4] Ps. xxxvi. 6. [5] St. Aug., *de Ordine I, c.* 1, no. 1. [6] 1 Cor. iv. 5.

a remarkable parable: 'If any one,' he says, 'were to look only on a single mosaic pavement, he might blame the workman as ignorant of order and composition, namely because he sees a little part of his work, the greatest part he sees not: if he saw all the parts and their connection, doubtless he would praise with wonder the work and the workman.' [1]

So therefore many see the wicked prosper and the righteous punished and afflicted, and they do not know what God reserves hereafter either for the iniquity of the wicked or for the patience of the righteous, and so they break forth into blasphemous words or say with those who spoke with Job, 'God walketh in the circuit of heaven: he seeth not,' [2] or with those others which say, 'Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them.' [3]

Saint Augustine frequently uses another parable taken from poetry. For if any one begins to listen to an heroic song and says in the beginning or the middle, the verse is not good, he is rightly considered foolish: for he should wait until all the syllables are sounded and then he may find fault if the song does not please. And so those persons are altogether foolish who dare to blame the most orderly providence of God before the whole scheme of providence has run out.

Therefore, my soul, if thou be wise, hinder, as much as thou canst, the doing of evil, for so God commands thee; but why he suffers the evil to be done, leave to his judgement, which may be hidden but cannot be unjust.

CHAPTER 5

Of the profound mystery of predestination and of reprobation.

BUT although the reason of the providence of God in governing human affairs is very deep, the reason of

[1] St. Aug., *de Ordine I, c.* 1, no. 1. [2] Job xxii. 14. [3] Mal. ii. 17.

his predestination and of eternal reprobation is without comparison far deeper. For why God fills many of the wicked with temporal goods and leaves their sins unpunished in this life, and on the contrary why he allows many innocent persons to be pressed in need and unjustly troubled, afflicted, tormented, and killed, we cannot search out particularly, but we can assign some likely general cause. For God often makes the wicked rich in temporal goods, to reward some of their good moral works, though he will not give them eternal life: or that he may allure them with temporal benefits to conversion from their sins and lead them to hope for eternal blessings: but sometimes he does not punish sins in this life because he will punish them sufficiently in hell. He allows the righteous to be afflicted with want, ignominy, and various troubles, sometimes that he may purge their light sins in this life, sometimes that he may crown their patience and humility and other good deeds with greater glory in eternal life. But why God loved Jacob and hated Esau before they had done either good or evil, who can tell? And this is what the Apostle wonders at in his Epistle to the Romans, for they were twin brothers, sons of one father and mother, and yet God loved one by predestination and the other he hated by reprobation.[1] And lest any one should perchance say that God foresaw the good works of the one and the evil of the other, the Apostle forestalls the answer, saying that this was done that 'the purpose according to election might stand,'[2] and he alleges the words of God to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.'[3] Who indeed will not wonder if one persevered a long time in good works and at the end of life failed and perished, as Judas the betrayer, and another persevering a long

[1] Mal. i. 2, 3; Rom. ix. 13. [2] Rom. ix. 11.
[3] ibid., ix. 15; cf. Exod. xxxiii. 19.

time in evil deeds and in the end of life entirely changed, passed to Paradise, as the good thief? But thou wilt say, Judas betrayed Christ and the thief confessed Christ. It is true: but could not Christ have looked on Judas as he looked on Peter and inspired Judas with that powerful grace which no hard heart can refuse? And could not Christ have given to both thieves who hung beside him faith and repentance as he gave to one, and, or suffer both to die in their sins as he suffered the one? And who can tell a reason why God taketh away some, lest wickedness should alter their understanding, as Wisdom speaks of Enoch,[1] and many he takes not away but suffers them to fall from virtue to vice and to end their days therein? What shall we say of whole nations, whereof some very early, others very late, are called unto faith, without which no one can be saved? 'For he that believeth not is condemned,'[2] and as the Apostle says, 'Whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent?'[3]

These are, therefore, very high and profound secrets which the eternal Father has hid in the abyss of his wisdom, whereat the Apostle wonders, but does not declare, when he says, 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgements, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord or who hath been his counsellor?'[4]

This only is lawful for us to know, that with God there is no iniquity and that at the last day there will be no one who shall not truly say, 'Righteous art thou, O Lord, and true is thy judgement';[5] and, moreover, this secrecy is profitable to us all, since it comes to pass

[1] Wisd. iv. 11. [2] St. John iii. 18. [3] Rom. x. 13.
[4] ibid., xi. 33. [5] Ps. cxix. 137.

that the wicked shall not despair of salvation nor the righteous presume on it: and also good men shall not be hopeless of the conversion of the wicked, but pray for all and carefully seek their salvation: and again, no one, however good and holy he may be, can be proud, when no one knows what to-morrow may bring forth, but all work out their salvation with fear and trembling.[1]

And thou, my soul, having considered all these things, 'Do thy diligence to make thy calling and election sure,' as the Apostle Peter advises thee in his later Epistle.[2] What good works those are which make our calling and election sure the Apostle John teaches, when he says, 'My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.'[3] For love is that with which no one is condemned and without which no one is saved: but charity is shown by works, namely when any one either bestows alms on the poor or forgives injuries from enemies not for hope of temporal reward or for inordinate affection for the creature, but out of inward and pure love of God and the neighbour. And since it is not enough to begin but 'he that endureth to the end shall be saved,'[4] the Apostle saith, 'Take heed,' that is with anxiety and care and diligence to give oneself to the business of eternal salvation. And truly there is no sign more likely of divine election, than when a man, being more careful about his salvation than any other thing, prays continually to God for the gift of true repentance, of true humility and perfect charity and perseverance unto the end: and not content with prayer only, strives also, as far as he can, to seek and to find the kingdom of God and his righteousness as our Saviour admonishes us.[5]

[1] Phil. ii. 12. [2] 2 St. Pet. i. 10. [3] 1 St. John iii. 18.
[4] St. Matt. x. 22, xxiv. 13. [5] ibid., vi. 33.

FOURTEENTH STEP

CONSIDERATION OF THE MERCY OF GOD

Chapter 1

The width of the Mercy of God which bears our miseries.

THE Holy Spirit sets forth the mercy of God in the Scripture, praising it so wonderfully that he does not hesitate to magnify it above all the works of God: for thus the prophet David sings, 'The Lord is loving unto every man and his mercy is over all his works.'[1] We shall easily perceive the greatness of this divine attribute if we consider it in its width, length, height, and depth.

The breadth of the divine mercy consists in this, that God, and he alone, can take away all miseries from all creatures; and some he takes away for the love which he bears towards his creatures, not on account of their profit to himself. Certain created things take away certain miseries, as bread takes away hunger, drink, thirst, clothing nakedness, knowledge ignorance and the like; but no created thing can take away every kind of trouble. Besides, there are certain troubles so much the more serious the more secret and inward they are, for which God alone can supply a remedy: such as the assault of devils, who are very many, very crafty, very powerful, and are most wickedly disposed towards us: such also are errors and blindness of mind and

[1] Ps. cxlv. 9.

warped conscience, which things we in ourselves do not perceive, so that often we are deceived, thinking ourselves to be very sound in our interior life when in truth we are very sick. Who can snatch us from troubles of this kind but only our Almighty Physician? And since God often delivers us from this kind of trouble without our being aware of it, all men may deservedly be called ungrateful towards God, as God himself witnesses when he says that the heavenly Father is 'kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.'[1] For we know hardly the least part of God's kindness, yet for that part we do not give thanks with the devotion and humility that we ought.

Next, creatures cannot take away all but only a few miseries, and not even from all persons, but from a few: but God can take away all miseries from all persons, and although he does not take away all from all, yet there is no one who is not in some way partaker of his mercy. Truly, therefore, does the prophet sing, 'The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.'[2] The Church says in her collect, 'O God, whose nature is ever to have mercy and to forgive';[3] since it appertains to him who is free from all manner of miseries to remove them, and it pertains to him alone to take away all miseries from all men, who alone is entirely without miseries. But who is entirely free from all misery but God alone, who is pure act, and the highest good, and whose Essence is beatitude? O my soul, if by consideration thou couldst conceive what is the life of thy Lord and thy Father, a life raised above all misery, and pure and unmixed felicity, how wouldst thou sigh for thy heart to be in his bosom, that of thee it might also be said, 'There shall no evil happen unto thee: neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.'[4] But thou wilt say, if God can take away all trouble from all things,

[1] St. Luke vi. 35. [2] Ps. xxxiii. 5. [3] Office for the Departed. [4] Ps. xci. 10.

why does he not do it, when he is the Father of mercies,[1] that is, a most merciful Father: whence comes it that, under the rule of the Father of mercies, so many afflictions abound amongst mankind, and why is it said, 'The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord,'[2] and not, on the contrary, 'The earth is full of misery'? God can indeed take away all troubles, yet he takes away only those which his wisdom judges ought to be taken away, and the divine wisdom judges it inexpedient for men that all miseries should be taken away, and it is mercy sometimes not to take away some misery, that greater mercy may afterwards be shown. The Apostle thrice prayed the Lord that the thorn in the flesh might be removed from him: and he was not heard, because 'strength was to be made perfect in weakness.'[3] God did not take from Lazarus the misery of poverty and sores, that by a greater mercy he might be carried by angels into Abraham's bosom.[4] And how should the rich exercise the works of mercy, if there were no poor, hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, travellers, prisoners? And if temptations and combats with demons were lacking, where would be the triumphs and crowns of virgins and confessors? And if there were no labours and sorrows, where would be the crown of patience? And if there were no persecuted, where would be the palm of the martyr? And so in this state of exile both are true: the earth is full of miseries because our very sins alone are great miseries, and also it is true that the earth is full of the loving-kindness of the Lord, because the conversion of sinners and the merits of the saints and other almost infinite benefits of God, both spiritual and temporal blessings, are nothing else but the great and continual mercies of God our Creator.

Let us therefore give thanks unto our gracious God, because as our tribulations in this pilgrimage abound,

[1] 2 Cor. i. 3. [2] Ps. xxxiii. 5. [3] 2 Cor. xii. 9. [4] St. Luke xvi. 19.

so also by his mercy our consolation abounds.[1] 'Thy mercy, O Lord, reacheth unto the heavens,' saith David:[2] for there shall be mercy without misery, because mercy shall take away all misery whatsoever.

CHAPTER 2

The length of the Mercy of God is his long-suffering or patience.

Now the length of mercy is long-suffering or patience, which Scripture usually couples with mercy, as a part thereof: for thus David speaks, 'The Lord is full of compassion and mercy: long-suffering and of great goodness';[3] and again, 'The Lord is gracious and merciful: long-suffering and of great goodness.'[4] Wonderful indeed is this long-suffering and patience of God our most merciful Father towards the human race, such as we do not find in a master towards his servants, nor in parents towards their children, though all are men.

And first, God is long-suffering towards sinners, waiting for them with incredible patience, sometimes from their early youth to extreme old age, permitting them to blaspheme his Name and to neglect his law, and in the meanwhile doing good to them and giving them rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness,[5] as saith the Apostle. And who is there among men, lord or parent, so mild and easy, who if he sees himself despised and harmfully used by slaves or sons, and knowing that they have continued a long time in this perversity, would not at length drive them out of his house? Yet the mercy of God is not overcome by the malice of men: but he is patient, 'not willing that any should perish,' as Saint Peter declares in his Epistle,[6] and

[1] 2 Cor. i. 5. [2] Ps. xxxvi. 5. [3] Ps. ciii. 8. [4] Ps. cxlv. 8.
[5] Acts xiv. 17. [6] 2 St. Pet. iii. 9.

Wisdom saith, 'Thou hast mercy on all . . . and winkest at the sins of men.'[1] Moreover, patience seemeth greater in this, that many sinners by the grace of God having been drawn out of the pool of misery and the mud of pollution, and the children of darkness having been made the children of light and from guiltiness of eternal death been called to the adoption of the children of God and to the hope of heaven, again and again, and often and often slipping back to their former vileness and ingratitude, yet are not forsaken by the long-suffering of God, but are most lovingly waited for and invited to repentance, and if they truly repent are received even as prodigal sons by the most merciful Father to the kiss of peace and to their former honours and dignity.[2] It was with good reason that the Lord answered Saint Peter when he asked how many times he should forgive an injury done to him by his brother, until seven times? 'I say not unto thee, until seven times; but until seventy times seven.'[3] What he does himself in extending pardon to the penitent, that he wills us also to do. But he himself puts no limit to reconciliation except the end of this life: as long as the sinner lives, even should he reach to a hundred or more years, rising and falling, he is received and pardoned by his most kind Father: no repentance is too late for the mercy of the Father if only it spring from a truly contrite and lowly heart.[4]

But no one ought on this account to abuse the goodness of God and put off conversion from day to day, since no one knows in what day or hour he will depart from the body and be summoned to the tribunal of a most righteous judge. But so much the more ought all men to be called and drawn to repentance by such incredible goodness of God, for if the Lord is so kind towards sinners who often fall back, what will be the sweetness of the Father towards those who, after once

[1] Wisd. xi. 23. [2] St. Luke xv. 11. [3] St. Matt. xviii. 22. [4] Ps. li. 19.

tasting the grace of God can never by any temptation be separated from it?

But there is another longanimity of God, beyond measure wonderful and lovable, which is exercised in suffering the offences of the righteous. For albeit from enemies God hath made us friends by his boundless goodness, slaves to become sons, those condemned to death to be heirs of his kingdom, yet so great is our ingratitude that daily we return him evil for good: for if the Apostle James says, 'In many things we offend all,'[1] what must we say, who are very far removed from the perfection of Apostles? Behold we speak with God in prayer, and forthwith, snatched away by imagination to think on other things, we as it were turn our backs on God. What master in the world would suffer his servants when standing in his presence and talking with him, to turn away suddenly and neglecting him to chat with their fellow servants? What shall I say of idle words, vain thoughts, fruitless works, excess in eating and drinking, sleeping and recreation, of neglect of holy things, of the omission of brotherly correction and of numberless other offences in which we all offend? And yet our God is 'good and gracious, and of great mercy unto all them that call upon him':[2] he suffers, so to speak, boorishness and impoliteness, follies and incivilities of his children which truly men will not suffer in their fellow men.

This Saint Augustine remarks in his tract on Psalm lxxxv[3] on these words, 'Thou, Lord, art good and gracious,' where he bewails human weakness in avoiding wanderings of mind in prayer and magnifies the long-suffering of God in bearing so many injuries of his servants.

'For he knoweth whereof we are made,'[4] and he deals with us as a mother with her babe, whom she cherishes

[1] St. Jas. iii. 2. [2] Ps. lxxxvi. 5. [3] A.V. lxxxvi. [4] Ps. ciii. 14.

and feeds, even if perchance she be struck by him. But although God suffers so many of our offences without breaking the bond of friendship, or removing the right of inheritance, yet he will not leave us unpunished in the day of judgement, when we shall give an account of our idle words,[1] unless he find them purged beforehand by tears or some other kind of satisfaction. And lest by chance thou, my soul, mayst consider thine offences light and therefore deceive thyself and neglect to amend them, hear Saint Bonaventura, writing in his life of Saint Francis, a man so greatly illuminated by divine light: 'Greatly,' saith he, 'did he think he offended, if being at his prayer his mind wandered after vain phantasms. When any such thing happened, he spared no confession, but forthwith made satisfaction. This course he practised so often that seldom was he troubled with these molestations. Once in a time of Lent he had made a little basket, to pass away some short time of leisure without being altogether unoccupied: which coming to his mind when he said his Hours, did somewhat distract it: wherefore being moved with zeal in his spirit, he burned the basket, saying, I will sacrifice it to God, whose sacrifice it hindered.'[2] And so we see that the wandering of the mind in time of prayer and praise of God is not so light a fault as many think: but great is the mercy and long-suffering of our God, because he is not grievously wrath and does not punish us unendingly on account of it.

CHAPTER 3

The height of God's Mercy is understood from the moving cause.

THERE follows the height of God's mercy, which is taken from the cause moving God to pity. And this indeed

[1] St. Matt. xii. 36. [2] St. Bonaventura, *Life of St. Francis*, *c.* 10.

is very high and above all heavens exalted, according to the Psalms, 'Thy mercy, O Lord, reacheth unto the heavens,'[1] and, 'Thy truth shalt thou stablish in the heavens.'[2]

For some men have pity on other men because they are in need of their help, and this is indeed the lowest degree of pity, since it does not rise above our convenience; and after this measure we have pity on horses and dogs and cattle. Others have mercy on others on account of relationship or friendship, namely because they are children, brothers, acquaintances, or friends, and this degree is a little higher, and begins to have the form of virtue. Certain, again, have mercy on others because they are neighbours, that is they are men as they themselves, created by the same God and of the same mould: therefore they do not discriminate between friends and enemies, good and evil, their own countrymen or foreigners, but they have pity upon all men, because they know them to be created in the image of God: and this is the highest degree to which mortal men can rise. But God hath pity upon all things because they are his creatures, and specially he hath pity upon men, because they are in his image, and more especially he hath pity on the righteous, because they are his children, heirs of his kingdom and co-heirs with the only-begotten Son. But if thou inquirest why God created the world, why he made man in his image, why he adopted him as his child and made him inheritor of his kingdom, there is no answer but this, because he so willed. And why did he will it, except that he is good? for goodness pours itself forth and communicates itself freely. Therefore his mercy is established in the heavens and from that highest dwelling, namely from the Heart of the highest Father, it came down to earth and filled it, as the prophet sings, 'The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.'[3]

[1] Ps. xxxvi. 5. [2] Ps. lxxxix. 2. [3] Ps. xxxiii. 5.

And so God finds in himself what prompts him to have pity upon us, as in us he finds matter for punishment.

Raise now, my soul, the eyes of thy mind to that most highest fountain of mercy: consider that absolute purity, unmingled with any purpose of private good. And when thou hearest the Master of all exhorting and teaching, 'Be ye therefore merciful as your Father also is merciful,'[1] strive as much as thou canst, not only to have compassion on thy fellow servants, but to be merciful with that pure love with which the heavenly Father is merciful to us. If thou forgivest an injury from one who maligns or abuses thee, forgive him with a true heart and cast into oblivion every offence, for our Father forgets our offences, as Ezekiel the prophet writes, 'All his transgressions that he hath committed they shall not be mentioned unto him,'[2] and, as David says, 'Look how wide also the east is from the west: so far hath he set our sins from us,'[3] lest, namely, they should seek to hurt us more; if thou givest alms to the poor, understand that thou rather receivest than givest, since, 'He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord,'[4] and therefore give with humility and reverence, not as alms to the poor, but as a gift to a prince; if thou sufferest any inconvenience in order to be of service to a needy neighbour, think how far thou comest short of thy Lord, who to serve thee gave his life and his blood. So shalt thou, without hope of earthly reward and without any motion of vainglory, but out of the simple and pure love of God and thy neighbour, make progress in the virtue of mercy.

[1] St. Luke vi. 36. [2] Ezek. xviii. 22. [3] Ps. ciii. 12. [4] Prov. xix. 17.

CHAPTER 4

The depth of the Mercy of God is seen in its effects.

IT remains to consider the depth of the mercy of God. As the height of the mercy is most manifest in the cause, so the depth would seem to be in its effects.

That mercy therefore is not said to be deep, but rather shallow, and superficial, which descends to words alone: that is deeper which raises and refreshes the unhappy, not only with consolations but with benefits: that very deep which comforts the needy not only by speech and deeds, but also by suffering and undergoing labours and sorrows for their sakes. God, whose mercy is infinite, hath pity upon us in all these ways. And first, he hath sent to us letters of consolation which are the divine Scriptures, of which the Maccabees say, 'We have the holy books of Scripture in our hands to comfort us.'[1] And not in letters only, but also by sermons of preachers, ambassadors for Christ to our reconciliation;[2] and God speaks to us by interior inspirations, promising us his help and protection: 'I will hearken,' saith David, 'what the Lord God will say concerning me: for he shall speak peace unto his people and to his saints, that they turn not again.'[3]

Secondly, the blessings of the mercy of God against our manifold miseries, both spiritual and temporal, are so many that they cannot be counted, for 'He crowneth us with mercy and loving-kindness';[4] that is, he surrounds us on all sides with the benefits of his mercy.

Thirdly, the mercy of God descended by the mercy of the Incarnation, met labours and sorrows, hunger and thirst, ignominy and reproach, stripes and wounds, the Cross and death, to redeem us from all iniquity and from everlasting death, which by our sin we had

[1] 1 Macc. xii. 9. [2] 2 Cor. v. 19. [3] Ps. lxxxv. 8. [4] Ps. ciii. 4.

deserved. Is there any greater depth to which the mercy of God could descend? Yes, indeed; for this he did, not as compelled, but of mere grace. 'He was offered because he himself desired it.'[1] For who compelled the Son of God, who thought it not a thing to be clutched at to be equal with the Father, and emptied himself, and took the form of a slave,[2] and became poor for our sakes, that through his poverty we might be made rich,[3] and humbled himself to death, even the death of the Cross, that he might give us life, and exalt us?[4] Indeed, love alone forced, mercy alone constrained him.

But there is something deeper yet: for in the work of our salvation he willed to bestow on us glory and honour. Well fitting seemed that angelic distinction: 'Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace.'[5] Glory to God, benefit to men: but the mercy of God willed all the benefit to be ours, and part of the glory to be his own, part ours. For he willed to bestow grace upon us, by which we ourselves should co-operate in the work of our salvation and truly merit eternal life, which Christ merited for us, not because the merit of Christ was insufficient, but that he might communicate to us the praise and glory of our own salvation: whence it is said in the Gospel, 'Give them their hire,'[6] and the Apostle glories and says, 'There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.'[7]

Lastly, the mercy of God towards men is most deep, especially to devout and God-fearing men, because it surpasses the affection of father or mother, which is the greatest affection we know on earth. Hear the prophet Isaiah, 'Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee';[8] hear David, 'Like as a father pitieth his

[1] Isa. liii. 7, Vulg. [2] Phil. ii. 7. [3] 2 Cor. viii. 9. [4] Phil. ii. 8.
[5] St. Luke ii. 14. [6] St. Matt. xx. 8. [7] 2 Tim. iv. 8. [8] Isa. xlix. 15.

own children: even so is the Lord merciful unto them that fear him';[1] and the Apostle makes us very sure of its continuance, when in the second Epistle to the Corinthians he calls God the 'Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.'[2]

And so God is not only the Father of them that fear him, but a most merciful Father, very ready to console; for he takes away the afflictions and troubles from his children which he judges to be expedient to be taken away from them, and therefore he shows himself to be the Father of mercies: and he provides ineffable consolation for the easy bearing of those troubles which he judges expedient not to be taken away, and in this he shows himself to be the God of all comfort.

And the Apostle says 'of all comfort' for two reasons: first because God knows how to console his children in every kind of tribulation, which indeed the world cannot do, because it often does not understand the cause of the troubles; so the friends of Job were 'troublesome comforters,'[3] as he himself says, because they knew not the cause of his sickness, and applied a medicine which was unsuitable: or because often the trouble is so heavy that no human consolation can meet it; but God, the most wise and skilful physician, can cure every infirmity, and therefore the Apostle says, 'Who comforteth us in all our tribulation.'

Next, he is called the God of all comfort, because he knows how to console so fully and richly that it were better to suffer the tribulation joined with such a consoler than to be without both, as it happened to a young man called Theodore, a confessor in the persecution under Julian the Apostate, who for ten whole hours was tortured with such great cruelty, and with such change of executioners, that no age records the like, and yet joyfully all that time sang the Psalms of David: and when orders were given to take him down

[1] Ps. ciii. 13. [2] 2 Cor. i. 3. [3] Job xvi. 2, A.V. marg.

he began to be sorrowful on account of the great consolation which he received from the presence of an angel while he was being tortured, as Rufinus writes.[1] And so it is no marvel if the Apostle says, 'I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation';[2] and in the beginning of the Epistle, 'Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble.'[3]

What thinkest thou, my soul, of this so abundant and continual, so pure and infinite mercy of God, who needeth nothing of ours, and yet out of the abundance of his love is as much concerned for his little servants, as if all his own happiness depended on them? What thanks therefore wilt thou give him? What canst thou ever do not to be ungrateful for such mercy? Strive then as much as thou canst to please him, and to carry out what will please him: and since it is written, 'Be ye merciful, as your Father also is merciful,'[4] begin diligently first to search out the miseries of thy soul: for indeed the miseries of the body are plain, and there is no need to admonish a man to take care of his body, for if the body even for one day is in want of food or drink, or passes one night without sleep, or by a fall or wound be hurt, it presently cries out, and is attended to with great care: but the soul fasts whole weeks from her food or languishes under wounds received, or even lies dead, and no one gives a care to her, no one has compassion.

Therefore again and again visit thy soul: examine all its faculties and see if they are in good health, whether they are going forward in the knowledge and love of the true God, or whether, on the contrary, they are working in ignorance and languishing in various evil desires, or whether even the understanding is blinded with malice, and the will corrupted by the disease of

[1] *Hist. ecc.* x, *c.* 36. [2] 2 Cor. vii. 4. [3] ibid., i. 4.
[4] St. Luke vi. 36.

envy or pride, and if thou find any such thing, cry to the Lord, 'Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am weak':[1] seek spiritual physicians and take timely remedies. And then, in the next place have mercy upon other souls, of which an infinite number are perishing, and yet for them Christ died. O soul, if indeed thou knewest the price of souls, namely the precious Blood of the Son of God, and at the same time the very great slaughter that is made of them by infernal wolves and evil spirits roaring like lions, thou couldst not but heartily have pity upon them and with prayer to God and in every other way endeavour to deliver them. And lastly, take compassion also upon the bodily needs of thy neighbours, 'not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth,'[2] remembering the word of the Lord, 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.'[3]

[1] Ps. vi. 2. [2] 1 St. John iii. 18. [3] St. Matt. v. 7.

FIFTEENTH STEP

CONSIDERATION OF THE GREATNESS OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD BY THE LIKENESS OF BODILY SIZE

Chapter 1

The breadth of the righteousness of God is universal justice.

THE righteousness of God is taken in Holy Scripture in four ways: first as universal righteousness, which comprises all virtues and is the same as holiness or uprightness. Thus, 'The Lord is righteous in all his ways and holy in all his works.'[1] Next it is taken as truth or fidelity, as in another Psalm, 'That thou mayst be justified in thy saying';[2] thirdly it stands for justice distributing rewards, as in the second Epistle to Timothy, 'There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day';[3] and lastly for justice punishing sins, as in another Psalm, 'Upon the ungodly he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, storm and tempest: this shall be their portion to drink, for the righteous Lord loveth righteousness.'[4]

Therefore the greatness of the divine righteousness may be noted thus, by considering the breadth of his universal righteousness: the length thereof, that is of his truth and fidelity: the height of his righteousness distributing rewards in heaven: and its depth scourging the wicked in hell with everlasting punishments.

[1] Ps. cxlv. 17. [2] Ps. li. 4. [3] 2 Tim. iv. 8. [4] Ps. xi. 7.

And to begin with the breadth: that righteousness is called by men universal, which so places a man that in every action he may conduct himself according to all the laws: and in this it comprehends all virtues, both theological and moral. But there is also a certain virtue called charity, which embraces all virtues in her bosom, commands the action of all virtues, and directs them to their final end. And this virtue, although it be a particular theological virtue, may yet be rightly called universal righteousness: for it so places man that he may conduct himself rightly towards God and towards his neighbour and thus fulfil the whole law. Thus the Apostle says, 'Love worketh no ill,' and, 'He that loveth, hath fulfilled the law,' and, 'Love is the fulfilling of the law,'[1] and Saint Augustine in his book on *Nature and Grace* says, 'Love begun is righteousness begun, love increased, righteousness increased, great love, great righteousness, perfect love is perfect righteousness.'[2]

Moreover, in God are all virtues without any imperfection, and in the place of those which may imply imperfection there is something far better and more excellent; and thus no goodness is wanting to him, since in him goodness and holiness are so great and so boundless, that in the best sense he is worthy to be called the only good and only holy.[3] Faith is therefore in God not a theological virtue, because faith is 'of those things which are not seen';[4] but God sees all things. Nor is there hope in God, because hope is the expectation of things to come; but God expects nothing, since from eternity he possesses all things. Neither is there in God repentance for sin, because God cannot sin: nor humility, since humility hinders a man from rising vainly above himself, and causes him to remain in his proper place; but God has nothing above himself

[1] Rom. xiii. 8, 10. [2] *c.* 70, no. 84. [3] St. Matt. xix. 17. [4] Heb. xi. 1.

by which he may seek to rise, because he is the Most High. Yet charity, the queen of virtues, is in God most complete: for he loves himself with an infinite love, because he alone perfectly knows the infinite good of his own Essence. And he loves also all things which he made: for thus saith Wisdom, 'Thou lovest all the things that are and abhorrest nothing which thou hast made,'[1] for God knows by his wisdom how to separate evil from good, that is defect from nature, even in the demons and the most wicked man, and he loves the nature which he made; the defect which he did not make, he hates. And further, there is such true charity in God that God himself willed to be called Love, as Saint John speaks when he says, 'God is love.'[2] But our love, when compared with the divine, is very narrow: for there are very many things which we do not love, because in them we do not easily separate good from evil, and many good things we do not love well and therefore we do not love with true charity, because we are evil, and follow rather cupidity than charity. And we love God unperfectly, not only because we do not love him as much as his goodness deserves to be loved, to which measure not even the angels reach, but also because we love less than we ought and also less than we might if we gave ourselves with more attention and diligence to prayer and meditation.

This queen of virtues in the Lord of virtues is accompanied with singular magnificence, unbounded liberality, incredible kindness and beneficence, patience and long-suffering passing thought, goodness and sweetness more than fatherly, unfailing truth and fidelity, mercy filling heaven and earth, righteousness most upright and unswerving, and lastly holiness most pure and unspotted; so that 'in his sight the stars are not pure,'[3] and the seraphim, amazed in astonish-

[1] Wisd. xi. 24. [2] 1 St. John iv. 16. [3] Job xxv. 5.

ment, cry aloud, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts.'[1]

O my soul, if thou didst carefully consider these things, with what fear and trembling wouldst thou wait upon God in praise and prayer: and especially with what reverence and humility wouldst thou at the holy altar offer to the eternal Father, in the sight of the angels, his only-begotten Son, for the salvation of the living and the dead.

CHAPTER 2

The length of the righteousness of God manifested in truth and faithfulness.

BUT let us pass on to what remains. The length of the righteousness of God shows itself by the truth and fidelity thereof. God is faithful in all his words,[2] saith the prophet; that is, the promises of the Lord, although pronounced many ages before by the mouth of the prophets, never will be frustrated, but fixed more firm than heaven and earth: for thus saith the Lord, 'It is easier for heaven and earth to pass than one tittle of the law to fail.'[3] And our Lord means by the law not only the truth of the commandments, but also that of all his promises, for what the Lord commanded must be observed, or punishment follows, and what he promised is by everlasting truth established and performed. Whence the Lord also saith, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away';[4] and Isaiah, 'The word of our God shall stand fast for ever';[5] and David, 'His commandments are true, they stand fast for ever and ever';[6] and the Apostle, 'Let God be true but every man a liar,'[7] and 'It is impossible for God to lie.'[8] The reason of this saying is

[1] Isa. vi. 3. [2] Ps. cxliv. 13, Vulg. [3] St. Luke xvi. 17.
[4] St. Matt. xxiv. 35. [5] Isa. xl. 8. [6] Ps. cxi. 7.
[7] Rom. iii. 4. [8] Heb. vi. 18.

that he, being wisdom, cannot be deceived, being omnipotence he cannot fail: but men, however wise, however good, however mighty, may both deceive and be deceived, because they neither know all things nor can they do all that they will, and they also that are good when they promise may soon become evil and not fulfil their promises.

Therefore if thou be wise, my soul, trust only in God, cleave only to him, and on him alone cast all thy care.[1] Be anxious to walk with the Lord thy God and he will care for thee; beware with all thy might not to offend his righteousness, and his mercy will always defend thee, that thou shalt not need to fear what man or devil can do unto thee.

CHAPTER 3

The height of the righteousness of God is perceived in the bestowal of heavenly rewards.

THE height of the righteousness of God is perceived in the bestowal of heavenly reward which God himself, as the supreme and most righteous judge, hath prepared for those that have lived godly and righteously. And first we shall discern how great is the magnitude of his righteousness if we compare God as a Judge, with men that are judges: and next if we compare reward with reward, that is, the reward which God will give, with that which men usually give.

Men as judges, even when princes or prelates, who have subordinates or servants, for the most part do not give just rewards to those that deserve them, for either they are unable for want of ability to give all according to their deserts, or because they do not know accurately what they deserve, since this depends on sincerity of heart and devotion : or again, because of their own

[1] 1 St. Pet. v. 7.

covetousness or malice or some other perverse inclination, they will not bestow a just reward on the righteous labours of their underlings : or lastly, because they themselves are overtaken by death before they can pay the rewards they owe: or they to whom the rewards are due depart this life before they begin to taste the fruits of their labours. But God bestows upon all righteous men rewards for all their good deeds, not only just rewards, but even beyond their deserts; for what good deed can be more lowly and more hidden than to give a cup of cold water to the thirsty ? And yet for this the Lord hath promised a reward,[1] and of the magnificent reward promised by the Lord, Saint Luke writes, ' Good measure, pressed down and shaken together and running over, shall men give into your bosom.' [2] Nor is there any danger that means will be wanting to God for giving rewards to all the righteous, since he himself is Lord of all things and can with his word alone multiply and increase all things to an infinite degree. And there is no fear that perchance he will be deceived in the number or value of the good deeds, since he is most wise, and all things lie open before his eyes and he himself trieth the reins and the heart of his well-deserving servants, and therefore he understands the mind, intention, fervour, and diligence with which they did all these things. And no one could suspect that there should be in God any ill will to defraud his servants and his children of their just recompense, since he is faithful in all his words. And lastly, he cannot die, since before all he is immortal, and all things live unto him, so that there is no danger of any, on account of death, being deprived of the due rewards.

Therefore it remains sure and established that all good works of all righteous men are justly rewarded by God, and thus it is very safe to treat with God in

[1] St. Matt. x. 42. [2] St. Luke vi. 38.

the matter of labour and reward, and dangerous and foolish to put one's trust in men and to expect from them just rewards for our works.

Let us now compare rewards with rewards, divine with human, heavenly with earthly. What, I ask, can men bestow upon those who work for them all day, who pass whole nights without sleep, or lay down their very lives in battle? O blindness of men! What can they bestow but small, base, and abject things which will last but a very short time? God gives great, sublime, and eternal things, and yet the former are sought after, the latter despised.

Saint John Chrysostom compares the palaces, cities, and kingdoms of this world which men admire, with those mud buildings which children fashion out of clay.[1] And indeed little houses and cottages are made by children with much labour, but they are laughed at by the elders, and often when the father or master sees the children leaving their books and too much taken up with these trifles, he throws all down with his foot and overturns in one moment the things which they very carefully and slowly constructed.

Even so, great palaces, towers, citadels, towns, cities, kingdoms of mortal men, in comparison with heavenly and eternal riches are as mud houses, and are laughed at by those blessed angels who behold them from above, and are often overturned by our heavenly Father and Master, that we may thereby understand how entirely vain and empty all these things are. And although now only a few observe this, yet in the Day of Judgement all shall see, when it will profit them little to understand. Saint Hilary in his commentary on Saint Matthew says that the Day of Judgement will show all these things to have been emptiness and naught.

But we will explain a little more clearly the nature

[1] *Hom.* xxiv, St. Matt.

of the heavenly rewards which are now spurned by many in favour of these earthly small rewards.

First, there will be in the heavenly kingdom many good things or rather all good things which can be desired, for all that live there will be happy, and happiness is defined to be a meeting together of all good things. And so there will be the good things of the mind, wisdom and virtue: goods of the body, beauty, health, strength: external good things, riches, pleasure, honour.

And next, all these things will exist in the highest, perfect, and most eminent degree: for God, who shows his power in the creation of the world from nothing, and his wisdom in guidance and providence, and his love and goodness in the redemption of mankind by the mystery of the Incarnation and Passion of his Son, will then show the magnificence of his bounty in the distribution of rewards, of palms and crowns to those who shall triumph over their enemy the devil.

And this wisdom will not be the beholding of divinity in the glass of the creature, but the very open vision of the Being of God, of the Cause of all causes, and of the first and highest truth, from which most glorious vision the souls of the saints will shine with such splendid light, that Saint John, speaking of that future glory, saith, 'We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.'[1] From the highest wisdom proceeds charity, the queen of virtues; charity so fervent, that always abiding in the highest good, it neither will nor can be separated from it. So the whole soul and all its powers shall remain established in the most complete happiness. The body will shine like the sun, as the Lord himself testifies when he says, 'Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father,'[2] and such will be its beauty: health will be immortality, strength will be impassibility;

[1] 1 St. John iii. 2. [2] St. Matt. xiii. 43.

and lastly, the body which is now animal will then be spiritual,[1] that is, so perfectly obedient to the movement of the spirit, that it will surpass the wind in agility and pass through walls by its subtilty. Its riches will be so great that it will want nothing but God, and in God to possess all things: for he hath set him over all his goods.[2] What shall I say of pleasure, since it is written, 'They shall be satisfied with the plenteousness of thy house: and thou shalt give them drink of thy pleasures as out of a river'?[3] What mind can conceive the delight of enjoying the highest good, of seeing beauty itself, of tasting sweetness itself, of entering into the joy of the Lord, that is, to participate in that joy which makes God happy? The honour and glory of the saints surpasses all speech, for in the sight of the whole world, of all men and angels, every saint will be praised by God himself and will be crowned as conqueror, and, the highest honour of all, will be placed as sharer of his kingdom on the very throne of Christ: for in the Apocalypse we read thus, 'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father in his throne.'[4] The prophet marvels at this sublime honour when he sings, 'How dear are thy friends unto me, O God, firmly established is their princedom.'[5] And if to this multitude and excellence of good things we add eternity, as an unspeakable adjunct, who can conceive the greatness of this heavenly felicity? and yet what we can scarcely conceive by thought, we shall prove by possessing, if by living soberly, righteously, and godly[6] we shall at length arrive unto that happy country; for those goods which the children of Christ acquire by momentary labours, shall indeed last for ever.

What sayest thou to this, O my soul? Wouldst

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 44. [2] St. Matt. xxiv. 47. [3] Ps. xxxvi. 8.
[4] Apoc. iii. 21. [5] Ps. cxxxix. 17, Vulg. [6] Titus ii. 12

thou pursue the games of children in building little houses of mud, rather than enjoy the possession of the eternal kingdom? Wouldst thou rather, which I abhor to think, take delight in the pleasures of beasts than come to the ineffable delights of angels? By thy mercy, O Lord, turn this away from the soul of thy servant, and rather pierce my flesh with the fear of thee and let obedience to thy law be to me 'sweeter than honey and the honeycomb,'[1] that crucifying my flesh with its affections and lusts,[2] I may aspire to the spiritual and everlasting pleasures of thy Paradise. Grant to thy servant, O Lord, to follow the footsteps of thy Christ, who, 'meek and humble of heart,'[3] 'when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered, he threatened not';[4] grant me to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, and with some confidence to look for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.[5]

CHAPTER 4

The depth of righteousness by which God hath prepared eternal punishment for sinners.

THERE remains to be considered the righteousness which God will exercise towards sinners in the deep abyss of hell. If this is to be done attentively and seriously, let us first understand how very true is that which the Apostle teaches in the Epistle to the Hebrews, 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.'[6] For if as we follow the order which we have followed in regard to righteousness rewarding the merits of saints, God the righteous Judge will punish all sins, even the lightest, such as an idle word, for thus we read in the Gospel, 'Every idle word that

[1] Ps. xix. 10. [2] Gal. v. 24. [3] St. Matt. xi. 29.
[4] 1 St. Pet. ii. 23. [5] Titus ii. 12. [6] Heb. x. 31.

men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the Day of Judgement.'[1] There are many sins indeed which men do not punish, either because they are unable to do so, the criminals withstanding or running away, or because they do not know whether the sins have been committed or not, or perhaps have not been sufficiently proved by lawful witnessess: or again, because they are unwilling to punish, being either bribed or influenced by favourites, or degraded by their own malice.

But God is Almighty, and therefore no one can resist his power. He is in every place and so no one can hide from him: 'Whither shall I go then from thy Spirit, or whither shall I go then from thy presence? If I climb up into heaven, thou art there: if I go down to hell, thou art there also.'[2]

He is most wise and knows all things, even those obscure and hidden in the inmost recesses of the heart: and he is in no need of witnesses in order that crimes may be proved, since the consciences of men are to the Lord as a thousand witnesses: and lastly, no gifts, no favours, can corrupt the justice of God, since he is in no need of our goods. And therefore it remains that there is no sin, great or small, grave or light, which can escape the judgement of God and the avenger of sinners, unless it have been purged beforehand by penitence: for in the degree in which in this life his mercy is generous in pardoning, in that same degree after this life will his justice be severe and rigid in punishing.

Of the time of this life Isaiah says, 'In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee';[3] and the Apostle explaining this in the second Epistle to the Corinthians says, 'Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation';[4] and of the future time after this life

[1] St. Matt. xii. 36. [2] Ps. cxxxix. 6. [3] Isa. xlix. 8. [4] 2 Cor. vi. 2.

Zephaniah cries, 'That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm.' [1]

And not only will all sins be punished with terrible torments which will be so great that man can now scarcely imagine them: for as 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him,' [2] so neither hath eye seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what the Lord hath prepared for them that hate him. For there will be very many punishments of sinners in hell, very many, and pure, that is, unmingled with any consolations, and (which infinitely increases the misery) everlasting.

There will be very many punishments, I say, since each power of the mind and each bodily sense will have its own torture. Weigh the words of the sentence of the supreme Judge, which are contained in the Gospel, 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.' [3] 'Depart,' he saith, that is, depart from the company of the blessed, deprived for ever of the vision of God, which is the highest and essential beatitude and the last end for which ye were created.

'Cursed,' that is, hope no longer for any kind of blessing, for ye are deprived of all the influence of grace, of all hope of salvation: no longer shall there rain upon you the water of wisdom nor the dew of good inspirations; no longer shall a ray of heavenly light shine upon you, nor grace of penitence take root in you; no flower of charity, nor fruit of good works, nor shall the 'Dayspring from on high' visit you henceforth for ever. Ye shall lack not only spiritual goods but also bodily, not only eternal but temporal; there shall be for you no riches, no delights, no consolation,

[1] Zeph. i. 15. [2] 1 Cor. ii. 9. [3] St. Matt. xxv. 41.

but ye shall be like the fig-tree which, cursed by me, at once dried up from the roots.[1]

'Into fire,' that is, into a fire burning and unquenchable which will embrace and torment with sharpest pains, not one member, but all the members.

'Everlasting,' that is, into fire which needs no feeding of wood in order to burn for ever, but is kindled by the breath of Almighty God, so that as your sin can never be wiped away, so your punishment will never end. And so most rightly doth Isaiah the prophet cry, 'Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?'[2] and so he says no one can patiently bear this, but they are compelled to bear it, impatient and wrathful and hopeless, though unwilling; and he adds, 'Their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched,'[3] and these words the Lord pronounces not once only, according to Saint Mark.[4]

The worm of conscience and recollection of the present time is added, for the wicked, if they willed, by a little care could have escaped the punishment and could have enjoyed everlasting delights. And lest any one should think that the condemned can take some refreshment by walking about and changing their place, hear what the Lord himself says, 'Bind him hand and foot and take him away and cast him into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'[5]

And so those wretched ones bound hand and foot in everlasting chains will lie always in the same place, deprived of the light of sun and moon and stars, scorched with fiery heat, weeping and groaning and gnashing their teeth with rage and despair. And not only do they suffer in hell most grievous pains, thrust into that one place most full of horrors, but beyond

[1] St. Matt. xxi. 19. [2] Isa. xxxiii. 14. [3] ibid., lxvi. 24.
[4] St. Mark ix. 43–45. [5] St. Matt. xxii. 13.

that, the extremest want of all things, disgrace, dishonour, with the utmost shame and confusion: for they shall lose in a moment palaces, fields, vineyards, cattle, clothing, gold, silver, and precious stones, and be brought to such destitution that with the rich glutton they shall desire a drop of cold water and shall not be heard. These proud and boastful men who, impatient of all trouble in this present life would suffer no disgrace, but preferred dignity and honour before all things whatsoever, in that theatre of the whole human race and all the angels, than which a greater never was nor shall be, will see revealed and publicly shown all their evil deeds, even those committed in darkness or hidden in the recesses of the heart, the most shameful betrayals, robberies, incest, sacrilege; for as the Apostle says in the former Epistle to the Corinthians, when the Lord shall come to judge the world he 'will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts, and then shall every man have praise of God,'[1] and doubtless there will be also blame from God to each impious and wicked man.

But so great will be the disgrace and confusion of wicked men in this assembly, that Saint Basil, in explaining the thirty-third Psalm, fears not to say that this will be the heaviest punishment of all, especially to the hypocrites and proud and all those greedy of honour, to whom honour has been in this world in place of God, an idol. But if these things which we have said concerning the loss of all good things as well heavenly as earthly, and concerning the most bitter sorrows and ignominy and disgrace, were to have some end, or at least some kind of consolation, or had some mingling of refreshment as all troubles in this life have, it might be thought that in some way these ills could be borne; but as it is quite certain and beyond

[1] 1 Cor. iv. 5.

all doubt that the happiness of the blessed without any admixture of misery will last for ever, so also the unhappiness of the damned will be always without any admixture of solace, that is, it will endure for ever: and they certainly are most blinded and foolish who do not endeavour with all their power, through any tribulation, danger, infamy, and death, which the Apostle calls momentary and light afflictions,[1] to come to the kingdom of heaven and the happiness thereof.

CHAPTER 5

Why the punishment of the lost is everlasting.

AND if perchance any should wonder why God, who is most merciful, hath assigned so cruel and lasting punishment to man's sins which very quickly pass away and which do not seem to be so grievous: let him hear Saint Augustine on the City of God: 'He that holds the condemnation too severe or even unjust, cannot truly apportion the guilt which incurred it, or the ease in avoiding the sin'; and further on, 'Who can fully relate the guilt of disobedience to a precept so easily kept, standing neither in awe of the commander's majesty nor in fear of the terrible punishment awaiting disobedience?'[2]

Saint Augustine indeed is speaking of the sin of the first man: but the condition is the same in all sins. For if we weigh it truly and not deceitfully, we shall find that every mortal sin is exceeding great and in three respects: First, it is a dreadful thing that the creature should not obey the Creator, when the dignity of the Creator is separated by an infinite distance from the lowliness of the creature, and by nature the creature is servant and by nature the Creator is Lord, and whatever the creature is or has he owes to the Creator and the Creator owes nothing to the creature.

[1] 2 Cor. iv. 17. [2] St. Aug., *de Civ. Dei*, xiv, *c.* 15.

Second, if the commands of the Creator were grievous, yet the creature ought to obey, but, 'His commandments are not grievous,'[1] and his yoke is sweet and his burden is light, as the Saviour himself saith,[2] therefore how great and inexplicable is the fault for worms of earth not to obey their Creator and in so easy a matter; besides, if God had not threatened sinners with the punishment of eternal death, perchance man might have brought forward an excuse for his sin, but since he has been so often and so specially warned by prophets and apostles that the punishment will be eternal, who will excuse the rebellion of sinners?

Lastly, if the sin of men condemned were not eternal, we might wonder why the punishment of sin should be eternal; but when the obstinacy of the condemned is eternal, what marvel if the punishment be also eternal? And the persistent pleasure in evil which will be common to condemned men and to devils, this perverse will, I say, turned away from God the highest good which shall so for ever remain, makes holy men have a greater horror of a deadly sin than of the fire of hell. Hear what Edwin the Englishman wrote of Anselm in the second book of his life: 'Conscience,' he says, 'is my witness, I lie not, that often we have heard him [Anselm] profess under the witness of truth, that if on one side he perceived the horror of sin and on the other he perceived the bodily pain of hell and must of necessity be overwhelmed by one of the two, he would choose rather hell than sin. And another thing perchance no less wonderful to some, he was used to say, namely, that he would rather be pure and innocent from sin and be in hell, than being defiled by polluting sin, possess the kingdom of heaven.' If this holy man spoke and felt thus because being illuminated by God he knew sin to be more grievous than the pains of hell, how much more will God, who pierces even

[1] 1 St. John v. 3. [2] St. Matt. xi. 30.

to the depth, the malice and defilement and perversity of sin, truly judge and award the punishment which he hath appointed from all eternity as most due thereto. Therefore, O my soul, make no mistake, be not led away, be not like unto those 'Who profess that they know God, but in works deny him.'[1] For many have faith, but habitually not actually, like a sword hidden in its scabbard; for if they actually believed, and believing, seriously considered, that God is faithful and just and that in truth punishments very heavy and unending and without any admixture of consolation are prepared for the wicked: it could not be that they would do things they do, and 'drink,' as it is said in the book of Job,[2] 'iniquity like water,' that is, commit so many and so great sins as easily and fearlessly and joyfully as if reward, not punishment, were due to sinners.

Do thou, I say, believe firmly, and believing, oft remember, that God is in this present life 'the Father of mercies,'[3] and ready mercifully to forgive the sins of all that truly repent, and that after this life he will become the God of vengeance,[4] and will exact from sinners those penalties which he hath prepared and which he commanded to be preached by his prophets and apostles, and to be handed down in writing for the remembrance of years to come. And in so doing it will come to pass that, being lifted up as it were by two wings, the fear of unutterable torments and the hope of exceeding great rewards, thou wilt pass in safety through the dangers of this present life and wilt come to life and rest everlasting. Amen.

[1] Titus i. 16. [2] Job xv. 16. [3] 2 Cor. i. 3. [4] Ps. xciv. 1.

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